

THE INTERSECTION OF THE PULPIT AND THE PEW:
A MODEL FOR TRANSPARENT
DISCIPLESHIP

Kan'Dace L. Brock

BA Sociology, University of Texas at Arlington, 2007
BSW Social Work, University of Texas at Arlington, 2007
MSW Clinical Social Work, Norfolk State University, 2010

Mentors

J. Elvin Sadler, DMin
Willie Marshall, DMin

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Kan'Dace L. Brock

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Mentors

J. Elvin Sadler, DMin
Willie Marshall, DMin

Date: _____

Approved:

Faculty Mentor:

Associate Dean of Doctoral Studies:

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ABSTRACT

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The context of this project is The Message Church (TMC) in San Antonio, Texas. The membership is having difficulty engaging in transparent discipleship because of low self-esteem, low self-confidence, and low self-worth. If the participants engage in a training program about transparent testimony, then they will have the tools necessary to engage in transparent discipleship. This project will last for six weeks. Data will be collected by pre- and post-test, group discussions, and focused journaling. Because the project participants engaged in a program on transparent testimony, they will acquire the tools necessary to engage in transparent discipleship.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The journey will change me, but it doesn't define me.

—Dr. Lauren Thomas-Quigley

An African proverb says, “I am because you are.” I can write this acknowledgement section because of the many people in my life that sacrificed so I could be here and matriculate through my Doctoral studies. First, I thank God for this opportunity to complete this chapter in my story. Had you asked me in 2010 after graduating from social work graduate school if I would have a terminal degree in ministry, I would have looked at you with an eye of suspicion and then chuckled because I never knew God was not only calling me to be a clinician in the community but also in the church.

To my parents, Len Council and Cedric Council (Evangeline Council), who raised me to give my best in all I do, I thank God for your dedication, love, and guidance then and now. To my God-gifted parents and family, The Parkers, you all took me in as your third daughter and never looked back. In your home, I gained another family, a best friend (Aramis), and a foundation that continues to assist me well into adulthood. To my in-loves, The Brocks, thank you all for being present and caring for our family as I had to travel for school and ministry. I can never repay you all for all you have done for the “other Brocks.” To my church family, The Message Church, who loves me with the love

of Christ and sees what God has in store for me and The Message Church. I am humbled to serve as your pastor today and for years to come. To Sisters With Vision also known as SWV, Rev. Dr. Adreania Tolliver and Rev. Denita Armstrong-Shaffer, we started together as scholars and now we leave the program as sisters, I love you ladies to life.

To the Sadler Marshall mentors and scholars, past and present. Thank you for challenging me when I wanted to hide and encouraging me when I wanted to give up. I am better because of my participation in this group. To my fellow “Sistah” preachers and friends, thank you for your encouragement along the way as I gave birth to two babies, Chloë and my project. To my professional associates, Rev. Dr. Claudette Copeland, Rev. Dr. “Al” Tolly Kennon, and Dr. Richelle White, and contextual associates, thank you for your guidance and expertise during this journey. I am blessed to know such giants in the ministry and in the academy.

Finally, to my loves, my husband, Rev. Dr. Fredricc Gerard Brock, and our beautiful girls, Zoë and Chloë, I love and appreciate you all beyond words. Fredricc, thank you for believing in me. Your encouragement and drive push me to be the best version of myself. Your presence means more to me than you will ever know. As a family, you all sacrificed so much as I had to be away and miss family time but know this was part of our journey. I am so humbled to be your wife and mother as we seek to leave our mark on the world. I love you all and cannot wait to see what God has in store for us as Brock party of four.

As we say at The Message Church, let us change lives and change the world.

DEDICATION

This body of work is dedicated to every person who has a story or a testimony to tell. Do not be afraid to tell your story as the world needs to hear from you, and only you!

ILLUSTRATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

What is transparent discipleship? Transparent discipleship is a model of ministry that encourages personal reflection on one's encounter(s) with Jesus Christ. These encounter(s) are then coupled with a willingness to be vulnerable or honest with those they share their story or testimony. While this may sound simple, the ability to identify and share honestly the impact Jesus has on one's life through identified obstacles can be difficult. As the pastor of a newly formed church plant, I wondered if the members struggled with the same hesitation to share their personal testimony as I did at one time in my life. After months of being together as a faith community and witnessing the hesitation of some members to share their stories publicly after telling my husband or me, it caused me to wonder if the ability to be transparent needed to be taught.

It was in the personal pondering that the formation of this public project was developed. In further development, several questions were asked that lead to the hypothesis, "If the project participants participate in a training program about transparent testimony, then they will have the tools necessary to engage in transparent discipleship." To test this hypothesis, the foundation for the project was established through four essential foundation chapters compromised of a biblical text, historical event and figures, theological basis, and an interdisciplinary component to compliment the sacred to the secular.

To begin, the biblical text for this project is Luke chapter 8:43-48. Before the story of the woman with the issue of blood, the Apostle Luke sets the stage by introducing Jairus and his request for Jesus to heal his critically ill twelve-year-old daughter. As Jesus and Jairus are en route to his home, the story comes to an abrupt halt because of the boldness and courage of the hemorrhaging woman to seek out Jesus for healing. During this time, when a person was considered ceremonially unclean, not only were they to remain isolated in their homes, but women were not to be seen in public without a male family member or companion. Seeing that the woman did not have access to either, she took a risk in leaving her home to see Jesus. She sought doctors and health care professional assistance for twelve years, but her condition did not improve. The text does not explain how she heard Jesus was in town but says she pressed her way in the crowd so she could “touch the hem of his garment.”

This touch leads to the woman’s healing as Jesus told her, “Daughter, your faith has made you whole go in peace.” While this encounter with Jesus led to her overall recovery and a renewed sense of life and affirmation; her story had larger implications. In the story, as with the project, is the ability to articulate one’s story. The woman tells Jesus that she touched him because she was not well and needed healing after twelve years of seeking treatment. This story is particularly important in understanding that the participants in the project will learn how to tell their stories from an identified issue(s) in their life rather than from a historical view of their life.

Though the Apostle Luke nor any of the Synoptic Gospels record what takes place after the woman meets Jesus, one can only imagine how the woman’s life was changed as she engaged life again healthy, whole, and affirmed by Christ. This woman’s

story sets the backdrop for the historical event and figures selected for this body of work: Women's Suffrage Movement and Gospel foremothers Jarena Lee, Julia A. J. Foote, and Zilpha Elaw. In addition to the aforementioned women, this identified movement, like the woman from Luke eight, impacts the trajectory of history, particularly for women of color, as they, like the woman in Luke chapter eight told her story.

Historically, when reflecting on the stories of women, African American women in the pulpit and the pews have set the stage for many pioneers today. In the historical chapter, it is found that while the Women's Suffrage Movement was fighting for the rights of women to vote, history often negates the movement within the movement. Black women fought this movement within the movement for their rights and others to vote and be seen. Like many of the movements during this time, the focus was primarily on White middle-class women's rights, who were thought to have more of a right to vote than both Black men and women combined. Though history is limited in speaking to the number of Black Woman Suffragist, those who were able to make a difference did so by ensuring their voices and stories were heard and told for years to come. Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated captures the impact its twenty-two founders had during the Women's Suffrage Movement and the risk the young women took showing up to a march that was predominantly White. The sorority members' courage and boldness to march showed the members' courageous spirit.

In addition to fighting for the right to vote for Black women, their preaching, and teaching sisters Lee, Foote, and Elaw took the pulpit and denominational bodies by storm, pressing their claims of being called to preach and teach the gospel. Like the woman with the issue of blood, the pioneers of the Women's Suffragist Movement, they,

too, ensured their stories were preserved and heard for years to come. They each wrote their autobiographies after being affirmed by God and not man. Though the chapter was limited to only mention the works of Lee, Foote, and Elaw, countless other women preachers can be found in history and today sharing their firm conviction by God to preach even when their denomination, self, and surroundings tried to convince them to give up. The women's willingness to stand for justice for all speaks to Womanist Theology, the theological foundational choice.

Womanist Theology, like the previous chapters, focus on the plight of women, particularly woman of color. Womanist Theology was the most appropriate fit for this body of work because of the relevance one's personal story has on how they experience God. From the theology's inception in the 1980s, Alice Walker's determination to have the voice lived experience, culture, and lives of the Black woman valued has impacted both the academy and church today. With the number of women leading in senior pastorates and other senior roles in the church, one cannot help but think of the impact Womanist Theology is having in the pulpit and the pews. This impact both in the pulpit and the pews leads itself to see the need for Womanist Theology to be part of the hermeneutics, particularly of the Black church.

If one is going to be a champion for women, then there have been consistent conversations about women in and out of the pulpit. Women must be seen and heard, both biblical and in the congregation. It is not for women to be celebrated once a year during annual days, but the lives and lived experiences must be a part of the church's tapestry and cultural fabric. Like the previous two chapters, Womanist Theology can share the story of the woman with the issue of blood, show the value and lessons learned

from the Woman's Suffragist Movement, and continue to celebrate the accomplishments of the Foremothers of the Gospel.

Womanist Theology is the vehicle for the stories of women to be heard and told for generations to come. Additionally, when one is learning to share their story, there must be an understanding of the impact of discipleship and testimony. In addition to hearing the stories of women as articulated by Womanist Theology, the fourth and final foundation which is the Interdisciplinary that compliments the sacred to the secular through the incorporation of the field of social work with a focus on mental health in Black communities. Social work with a mental health focus was an appropriate and logical choice as the researcher is a mental health clinician.

Social work with an emphasis on African American mental health is the tool in which this project has developed the resources needed for completion. As a holistic social science, social work focuses on the whole person. With a focus on the entire person, as this project aims to highlight through transparent discipleship, the ability of parishioners and practitioners alike to see the needs of their stories is required for wholeness. Like the hemorrhaging woman, when she encountered Jesus Christ, her entire life changed. In social work, the goal is to address the needs of the individual with anticipation that the systems and communities they are a member of will continue to grow and flourish, hence leading to lifetime changes. Though mental health was not discussed explicitly in the previous chapters, if one is to practice wholistic ministry, mental health, particularly that of African Americans, has to be on the forefront of one's mind.

Without acknowledging one's mental health or illness, it will be challenging to continue in effective ministry or even articulate how one's faith has been effective in

their ability to cope. As shown in the lives of Jerena Lee, Julia A. J. Foote, and Zilpha Elaw, all of whom shared a struggle with their mental stability at one time or another in their journey. This attention, particularly to an underserved population, will provide the courage needed to engage in one's mental, emotional, and spiritual help.

After the foundation was established, the project was then designed into a six-week training course in which leaders and participants met for one hour to discuss an outlined topic that engaged their personal and spiritual lives. At the conclusion of each of the sessions, the participants were left affirmed and then asked to complete a focused journaling assignment that reinforced the lesson discussed that week. Furthermore, at the conclusion of the six-week project, each participant was asked to complete a project evaluation that informed me if the hypothesis was correct or incorrect.

At the conclusion of the data analysis, one will find that the participants were not only comfortable in telling their story, but in fact, had already told others about their story before attending the training program. While this outcome was not anticipated, I walked away understanding that the participants not only value their stories, but they are not afraid to share with others the goodness of Jesus Christ in their personal life.

It is in their personal testimony they are able to have a powerful witness that leads to the sharing of their stories with others. Overall, the participant's ability and willingness to articulate their personal story leads people to anticipate the assisted growth in the ministry as others are discipled through transparent discipleship.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Introduction

This chapter describes how my ministry interests and skills as a pastor and mental health clinician come together and currently impact my current context of ministry in a new church plant in the City of San Antonio, Texas. This relationship or synergy between the two will thus determine my project and the impact it can have in our church and churches around the nation. This chapter further describes the context, ministry journey, development of the synergy, and implications for ministry before providing a conclusion.

Context

The context for my project is the church that my husband and I founded in 2017 but officially launched in 2018—The Message Church of San Antonio, Texas (TMC). We established TMC under the guidance of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) and with the current support of The Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT). As a church plant, TMC resulted not from a church split or division, but we birthed TMC following our return to our hometown after serving a two-year term in an established Baptist church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Notably, while TMC has the spiritual support of my church of ordination (The Antioch Missionary Baptist Church of San Antonio) and financial support of my childhood church (Resurrection Baptist Church), CBF and

BGCT, none of these entities provided TMC with any musicians or other human capital at its inception. TMC started from the ground up. The members of TMC are people that consider themselves to be “de-churched,” “church transfers,” or “New Christians.”

Before having a constant group of attendees, in the initial phases of TMC, Fredricc and I met weekly for Bible Study with only him and me in attendance. While discouraged, we continued to meet. During the third month of our meetings in the fall of 2017, more people came who would eventually be part of the launch team. Fifteen people comprised our launch team or our founding members, and all except one member are still present and active in the church.

Since its infancy, Fredricc and I, along with members of the launch team, continue to utilize social media, word of mouth, and other social media tools to engage San Antonio and its surrounding community. While this proved to be taxing at times, TMC began to grow. Before our current location on the campus of Baptist Temple Church (BTC), TMC met on the west side of San Antonio on the campus of Bethany Missionary Baptist Church. Pastor and First Lady Randle hosted TMC for almost six months before our move to our current location on the campus of BTC. With a more northeast presence, which is close to our believed target area, and change in service time from 8:00 am to 9:00 am TMC saw a growth in attendees.

Another dynamic that impacts our current location is that TMC is one of six churches on the campus of Baptist Temple Church (BTC). Baptist Temple Church is a large, predominately White church that opened its doors to other churches to come and worship on its campus. While this opportunity provided a space for TMC to worship, a majority—if not all—of its attendees’ commute from around the Bexar County area.

While our congregation reflects the growing number of churches in the United States that would consider themselves as commuter churches, TMC would like to move further north to grow and engage the community. What is interesting about the demographics of TMC is that while we founded it unapologetically as a Black church, we have a racially and culturally diverse congregation. While the majority of TMC identifies as African American or Black, the congregation also includes interracial and Hispanic couples as well as same-sex members.

Young to middle-aged adults comprise the majority of TMC with a few members over the age of fifty-five. The change in demographics caused a shift for Fredricc and I as we anticipated most of the members to be in our peer group (aged eighteen to thirty-five) but found that several attendees are older than us (Fredricc and I are thirty-six and thirty-five years old, respectively). We have several children from as young as eighteen months to college students. We have a significant presence of military members who are either active duty, retired, reservist, civil service, or militarily connected through a family member. Having a significant military presence has been an asset as Fredricc and I are a military family. When speaking in terms of structure and flow, the members are adept and ready to follow structure and order. TMC has several small business owners and working professionals. Many of the members of TMC have four-year degrees and we have several members currently matriculating through higher education. TMC is also fortunate to have several members with various accredited master's degrees, two members have terminal degrees while four members currently work toward completion of masters and terminal degrees in multiple fields and backgrounds.

As mentioned earlier, TMC has about fifty to sixty regular attendees, but only about twenty officially joined. Considering someone a member requires one of two actions to take place. The first is a person can publicly stand before the congregation on a Sunday morning, following the preaching, and informing one of the ministerial team members of the person's individual or family decision to join TMC. In addition to prospective members standing before the congregation on a Sunday morning to join, TMC offers a more personal and informal way of joining the church. Acknowledging the discomfort some people have in standing before crowds, people can join from their seats through a "connection card." Like a contact card given to first time guest, the connection card asks the person if they would like to join TMC or formally accept Jesus as their Savior. The person is then asked to return the card to the ushers or place in the offering receptacle for one of our connection counselors to meet with them after church. Fredricc and I make sure to connect with the individuals and families who have made the decision to join TMC.

Considering someone a member requires a person to publicly stand before the congregation on a Sunday morning, following the preaching, and informing one of the ministerial team members of the person's individual or family decision to join TMC. In addition to joining the church through a public and vocal declaration, the person or family completes a new member's orientation, commits to attend service weekly, participants in Life Class on Thursday nights (Bible studies), and financial supports the church through their tithes and offerings. In an ideal world, we would like to have the newly joined member complete a new member's orientation program. New Member's Orientation is currently in the works with anticipation of starting in the fall of 2019. New

Member's Orientation will serve as an opportunity for the new members to learn the history, vision, mission, and values of TMC. This orientation also provides an opportunity for new members to learn and identify their spiritual gifts and provide them with a chance to get connected with others or Messengers as members affectionately call one another.

Since launching TMC, talking to attendees revealed that while they have not officially joined the church in the manner described above, attendees, and in some cases their families, are committed to the vision, mission, and values of the church. They are the first to invite others, to make a post on social media, and to share privately with Fredricc and me how much they love TMC. Moreover, while I appreciate their love for Christ and the church, I still wonder why they have not taken the next step in joining. Do they fear commitment? Have other churches hurt them in the past and want to continue to “date” TMC until they can trust us? While reading this chapter, one may ask the question, “Why is church membership so important?” One may also ask, if people come and give, why is it important for the people to “officially” join TMC? Those individuals that publicly confessed their dedication to Christ through their service and attendance at TMC faithfully give and participate. They arrive early and leave late. They are committed to giving even when they are absent and ask what more they can do for the vision and mission of the church to become one. In my questions and conversations with the leadership of our church, I reflect deeply on the importance of church membership, but even greater the importance of knowing and sharing one's story with others, particularly when taking the risk to invite and join a brand-new church.

Ministry Journey

When reflecting I wonder how I got here? How did Kan'Dace Len (Council) Brock, a little girl raised in a church that failed to affirm women in ministry, come to pastor a church in the city of my childhood? As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, I am a mental health professional. I have a bachelor's degree in sociology and a bachelor's degree in social work. I completed a Master of Clinical Social Work degree in 2010 and became a licensed master social worker in the spring of 2011. However, before I officially became a mental health practitioner, I received mental health services. As young as seven years old, following my parent's divorce, I recall participating in group counseling at my school. Though I did not appreciate the time spent with other children going through a divorce, I wanted to help others to not feel the way I did as a child. As I aged, I visited my school counselor's office needing to vent or even asking to speak to my youth and senior pastors. My openness to counseling always existed due to my life-long battle with personal insecurities and problems that arose in life. Primarily, I always shared my story anticipating that someone else could either assist me or benefit from whatever I share.

After completing both of my undergraduate and graduate degrees, I obtained my social worker's license in the state of Texas. The state of Michigan also held my license for two years as a licensed master social worker. As a licensed master social worker, I held several positions with populations that I would consider to be part of what the field of social work calls underserved populations—those for whom the broader community fails to meet needs. From my work with minority mothers and children to my current

position as a mental health counselor in the Bexar County jail, many of my clients and church members as well as myself are members of underserved populations.

Looking back at the ministries in which I served throughout my life, I participated in the greeting ministries, feeding the homeless, women's ministries, serving pastors, and a host of "service to others" ministries. I cannot recall a time in my ministry journey when I failed to serve. I found my greatest joy in serving and living out the motto "Leaving people in my presence better than they came." Before formally acknowledging my call to the preaching ministry, I served alongside my husband during his time as Youth Pastor, and then as first lady in Michigan during his senior pastorate. While mentioning my ministry as first lady may seem trivial to some, being a pastor's wife was indeed a time of growth and a training ground for my current position as a lead pastor. My time as first lady allowed me to connect to the congregation in ways that I never imagined. Seeing myself as the pastor's eyes and ears in the congregation, I made it a point to speak to as many people as I could before and after service. This I did to check on family members and provide Fredricc a detailed report of situations happening in the congregation. I worked as a quasi-assistant pastor without the title. I sat in counseling sessions, attended the basketball games of our youth, and sat on the front porch of a community member who needed someone with whom the member could talk. My time as first lady was part of who I am today and has continued to impact the way I minister within and outside of TMC.

As mentioned, TMC is a church founded in 2017 but officially launched in 2018. Before the launch of TMC, Fredricc and I took a year to fast, pray, and seek the counsel of our mentors and pastor. When we left Grand Rapids in 2014, we were not in a

functional space spiritually, emotionally, or mentally. We knew that we had to deal with the church hurt we sustained while serving in Michigan; but we were afraid. Never did we imagine coming back home after serving two years. Growing up Baptist, we understood that you go to a church, and you die in that church; you do not leave. So, this was a paradigm shift for Fredricc and me to have to return after a short time away.

Upon our return in 2014, we immediately returned to our home church and served as associate members. Before leaving, I was not a minister, but we returned as a ministry couple with both Fredricc and I serving as ministers. This was a rough transition for me as I did not acknowledge my call in Texas, but per the protocol of our home church, I could not serve until I went before the church and again acknowledged my call to preach. I went through ministerial development and preached yet another trial sermon. Honestly, this added to my church hurt because I felt like I started all over again. I attended ministers' meetings in Michigan, preached, taught, and assisted as needed, and here I was back at what I felt was square one. However, I did not quit; I continued to serve. Even in our serving, Fredricc, and I knew that our time back at our home church was limited as we knew that God called us to start a church. Before we departed from Grand Rapids, a good friend and mentor, asked us the question, "When are you going to start the church?" At the time of her asking, we did not want to acknowledge it, but Fredricc and I knew that our friend and mentor spoke words of truth. So even in serving at our home church, we did not shy away from the call on our lives to plant. In 2015, we formally met with our pastor and first lady and discussed how we felt led to begin a church. Even though we continued to serve, it was not an easy time in ministry for me.

I attempted to attend the women's ministry and was uncomfortable. As a mental health clinician, I noticed that I secretly transferred my feelings of hurt and frustration from Michigan to the women in the group. I knew this was unhealthy, but I never saw an outlet to share my story. I tried to participate where I could, but God would not allow me nor Fredricc to get comfortable. As the result of our discomfort and final surrender to God's plan, we became and still serve as the lead pastors of TMC. While we use the language of lead pastors, the language of co-pastor may translate better when speaking of the structure of the church. Within the structure of TMC, while others refer to me as a lead pastor, I function primarily as an executive pastor.

I work with our staff and volunteers, conduct staff meetings, and participate in the logistics and long-term planning of the church. In addition to my call to the preaching ministry, I serve as the Founder and CEO of Honey Be YOU—a women's empowerment ministry. In this ministry, I continuously engage my organizational skills and planning for the ministry's yearly conference held every third weekend of January. I am intentional in the means and way I encourage, equip, and empower women of all races and creeds. I founded this ministry at a time in my life when I felt defeated and attempted to be someone I was not. I asked God to allow me to give back to the community from the hurt I sustained within the church. I never wanted anyone to feel like the actions of the church or the local assembly reflected God. I wanted to show people—particularly both in the Church and in this ministry—that God loves and cares about them. Honey Be YOU allowed me to be myself and continues to provide a safe space and place to share my gifts and the gifts of so many other women in the City of San Antonio. In starting Honey Be YOU, my role as a servant-leader is fulfilled as I serve the women in attendance. I am

involved in every part of the conference—from decorating to personally greeting each woman in attendance. Honey Be YOU, and our church allows me to live out the life goal of having people leave better than they came.

As I reflect on my educational and professional development, I can say that I have always considered myself to be a professional. From a young age, both of my parents instilled in me to always be professional. My mother and father who worked in some aspect of customer service and worked as a retired Air Force Chief Master Sergeant respectively, both saw the impact professionalism can have—particularly in the lives of African Americans. I never shied away from working and asked my parents to allow me to work during the summers of my junior and senior years of high school so I could prepare for college. From the summer hire jobs I worked with the United States Government as a teenager and young adult, to my current position as a mental health counselor at our city's county jail, professionalism remained a personal priority. I live by the phrase "People will never forget how you treat them." This mantra served me well as I matriculated through my education and ministry journey. My professionalism allowed me to serve on various committees and meet dignitaries of cities and communities because of the way I treated people. Without me knowing it, professionalism was ingrained in me since I was a child. I found that as pastor and mental health clinician, people always remember the way I treat them. They are still mindful of the way I respond to them before and after I preach and teach. Professionalism proved to go a long way in the rapport and relationships I have and continue to establish with others.

In addition to being professional, I have a genuine interest in seeing people being successful in whatever they desire to do. This interest is not for self-gain, but it comes

from the love I have for others. The desire to see people succeed in the goals they accomplished makes my role as a social worker and pastor easier in that it enables me to see and minister to the whole person. I see my position as a social worker as part of my calling or, what I better describe as, my life's work. I often tell people that Jesus was one of the first social workers: Advocating for the disadvantaged and disenfranchised, brokering services for others, and assisting with meeting the immediate needs of everyone with whom Jesus came in contact on His journey.

My ability to teach others assisted me both in education and in my profession. While growing up in church, I could teach Sunday school. My teachers provided me with the Sunday school lesson in advance, sat down with me to develop a lesson plan, showed me how to take notes, and then assisted me in teaching on Sunday mornings. The time spent with me in preparing for Sunday school has not given way to me preaching and teaching in conferences and seminars during my college years nor in the present.

As I continued to reflect on my journey, I found that one of the areas in my journey that impacted me and will always impact me is my gender. I am a woman in a male-dominated field. I am a woman—a preaching and teaching woman—who others call pastor in the Black Baptist faith tradition. Moreover, while I made this public and unashamed declaration, I know that some hold me to a different standard than my male counterparts; a standard that consists of my attire, my appearance, and my scholarship. One bad day and someone could call into question my call to the preaching ministry. Others imposed this standard at birth and society placed this standard on both genders. I will always have to work a little harder than my male colleagues. Even though I am a Black woman, I am familiar with the struggle. I am determined to perpetuate no longer

the stereotypes and ignorance others placed on me—both subconsciously and consciously.

In my role as pastor, I work hard to change the standards in the Baptist community in the city of San Antonio through my presence at various events and functions. Even though TMC does not carry the name Baptist in her name, TMC has roots in the Black Baptist church tradition. While I acknowledge there are some men and women who will never accept me as a preacher or pastor, I must continue to work hard and make women in ministry the norm at TMC through our teaching, ordination, training of others, and our alignment with other organizations, who like us, affirm and support women in ministry.

My role as both clinician and pastor allows me to bring people to the table, identify the needs, and prepare a plan of action through the word of God and community resources. My journey to this point as a newly appointed pastor is a role for which I prepared in anticipation of helping not only my church but churches around the nation by identifying that each of their attendees have a story—a testimony in church vernacular—and need a space to share.

Development of the Synergy

I wonder, “What is the synergy in my own life and the church?” How are the worlds of pastor and people colliding? Where does my personal life become public? After much reflection based on my spiritual autobiography and contextual analysis, I wrestle with the themes of self-doubt and confidence as it relates to one’s involvement within the church, and even greater, the Body of Christ. For my Doctor of Ministry

project, I will further investigate how one's testimony or story can impact the healing of self and others.

What is my testimony? What is significant about my story. In February 2018, I was formally ordained at the Antioch Missionary Baptist Church. This ordination was historical in that I was the second woman to be ordained at the church. My ordination was coming on the heels of a trailblazing staff member, who I know and love. She set the bar high; and I was ready to continue the standard set. I did what all the ministers in training do. I studied, continued to serve, and was praying for this moment. What people did not know, was that prior to my ordination, I was struggling with a mental illness. I was struggling with Postpartum Depression. In March 2017, Fredricc and I had welcomed our first child. This welcoming of our first child came with its challenges. During the delivery, myself and my daughter's lives hung in the balance as I was rushed back to the operating room for an emergency cesarean section. After coming out of surgery, we had a prolonged hospital stay due to the missteps of the hospital staff in caring for our daughter. After being discharged, I had further complications that required I return to the emergency room shortly thereafter.

While I loved being a mother and did what I could with the help of family and friends, deep down inside I knew something was wrong with me. I knew that I needed to get help. I found myself disengaged from my child, loss of appetite, crying all the time, and even began to suffer from suicidal ideations. I knew this was not normal.

It was in the latter part of 2017 I sought the help of a mental health professional. I was embarrassed to share my story because as a mother, this was supposed to be a beautiful time, but I was struggling. I was afraid to share with Fredricc what was going

on, until he asked me one day. It was in his asking I knew I could no longer hide from my struggle. I reached out to my doula, and she provided me with the contact information of a well-known counselor in the city. I contacted her office and arranged my first session with her. It was during this hour-long session I heard the validation I needed, “You are a textbook example of Postpartum Depression.” When she formally diagnosed me, I felt like a weight had been lifted all my shoulders.

As a formally trained clinician, I was aware of the importance of mental health, but I was too ashamed to come forward. How in the world did the mental health clinician need a clinician? How would this new diagnosis impact my ability to sit before the church and the ordination council? I could not give up. So, I began therapy weekly while working and preparing for ordination. I solicited the help of family and friends when I needed and committed to being the best I could through a lifestyle change. As part of my testimony, I did not take medication, but engaged in an exercise regime that provided the same medical support as depression medication could provide. This was part of my story.

It was during the personal acknowledgements during my ordination, I publicly shared a brief portion of my testimony. I shared with the people in attendance that I was recovering from Postpartum Depression. Though my timing was not ideal for some, the reactions of the majority made my decision to share the best choice. I was no longer ashamed or felt less than, but I felt empowered and prepared for the journey I was taking as the soon to be lead pastor of TMC. I knew my story would allow others to share their story.

Part of starting something new, particularly a church, I knew that I needed to bring all of my expertise and life experience on this journey. As a mental health clinician,

I knew the importance of establishing a rapport with others. Once I establish a rapport, I can ask questions about a person's story once thought to be intrusive. As a clinician, I am well within my scope of practice to identify a clinical diagnosis and immediately connect the person with community resources for ongoing care. As a clinician, I view the person as a holistic being with the understanding that there is more to the person in front of me than what I see. I work under the guidance of a mind, body, spirit, and emotional being. Mainly as a social worker, I work under the direction of both my professional license in understanding that the government mandates that I report specific actions, behaviors, and concerns such as suicidal ideations and thoughts. As a social worker, I allow others—like Christ allows us—to exercise self-determination. With my formal training as a social worker and the guidance of the Holy Spirit as a pastor, I can utilize both areas to engage members fully.

As a new Pastor with new people, attendees and members alike offer a level of grace that I did not encounter while serving in established churches. While impatience may eventually replace this grace, both members and pastors work through “stuff” to finally give God the glory. My professional and pastoral role will provide me with the ability to tackle such topics such as self-esteem, self-worth, mental health, confidence in self and the church, relationships, and several other private and vulnerable areas. My experience with vulnerable moments enables me to recognize and react appropriately to the needs of the group and the overall context. This ability to be sensitive to the needs of others is possible through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and self-awareness. I am aware of how to handle those moments, and when to share with the group, we need to step away for the day.

Knowing that the project topic is one that can be sensitive and will cause a level of vulnerability, I will structure the project to be part of our weekly Life Classes with anticipation of gathering participation in an already intimate setting. Our Thursday evenings will not look like a worship service with singing, teaching, and preaching, but more so a gathering amongst sister-friends and brothers with the goal of learning who they are in Christ, and the importance of knowing, learning, and sharing their story with others. There will be an opening affirmation and a time for prayer in which we are all on one accord. The sessions will begin with an emotion check-in by the group leader to see how everyone is doing. This check-in will serve as an indicator for the leader to gauge the group dynamics and possibly change the topic for discussion if needed. Established group norms or rules to which everyone agrees too will exist. There must be mutual respect amongst the participants in understanding that while we gather to grow, we must respect each other's boundaries. Each session would last for an hour, as that is the time allotted for our weekly life classes. After each session, I will provide participants a calendar and a weekly assignment—nothing extensive but an assignment to keep the week's topic at the forefront of their minds and prepare them for the week ahead.

To measure quantitative change, the project will begin with a pre and post-test for participants to report about themselves and their understanding of what it means to be a church member and the importance of knowing their story. I will then take the results of this survey and address a mix of personal and church topics. While the execution of my project will be part of our church's weekly life class, I will structure it as such that if someone were to join during week six, they would not feel unwelcome or not part of the group. In addition to pre and post-test, I will lead structured conversations that address a

variety of topics that all connect to self-worth and self-esteem. I will ask each participant to prepare a spiritual autobiography and read it to the group. There will be a story-linking component for people to not only share their stories but to see how their stories impacts them and the body of Christ. I anticipate a time for affirmations and moments in the group for each member to ask questions and present answers as the member feels led.

After the completion of the project, I seek to learn how self-perception can impact one's desire or ability to become part of a group—particularly a faith community. I want to look at the impact of life experiences, mental health, and exposure on one's ability to stay connected to a local church or become disconnected. Personal experience taught me that I deserved to be a part of certain groups because of my expertise and profession. There are other groups, such as the church, of which I needed to be a part as a reminder that God did not design me to be alone. This means being part of a local church where I can serve with others who are not perfect but seek to serve a perfect God. Ultimately, I hope to gain a better knowledge of the process in place at TMC and how we can develop a culture and model for “transparent discipleship.”

Implications for Ministry

Transparent leadership defines the desire for members of TMC to be disciplined—as Jesus called for the church to do according to the Great Commission given in Matthew 28:19-20—in addition to learning, articulating, and sharing their personal stories with others. If ministry leaders can learn the principles and practices of transparent discipleship, then they will have the tools necessary to engage efficiently in ministry. The tools acquired during the project will assist leaders as they lead in and

outside of the church. The leader's ability to identify their story, articulate the impact Christ has on it and their progression forward will assist them in connecting with others.

This project will also provide a space for people to share their own stories. One may wonder why I use the word "story" instead of the vernacular of the church ("testimony"). While everyone has a testimony, this project will engage the historical formation of the individuals, with a look at significant moments for one to evaluate noted behaviors and patterns that result in one's current outlook on life. Even though I will complete the project in a church context, one can take this project and tailor it to various settings; particularly within a context that is membership oriented. Members actively participate in the life of the community and assist with the continued progression of the identified group.

A natural and anticipated outcome of this project is the recognition of services needed outside of the church. Though I work as a clinician, if someone identifies a need for services the church is unable to provide, the group leaders and its participants can share their expertise in connecting the participants with the services needed. This outgrowth will reflect the transparency of one's circumstance and situations. This project will also show areas that the pastors and its leaders can better equip the members as they seek to live life as God has called them to live.

Conclusion

New churches present an opportunity for new beginnings in the life of those who have become disconnected from the church, left their churches, or are new to the church. While new beginnings are welcomed, one can miss one's opportunity to start anew

because of one's lack of commitment due to self-doubt and a distorted self-perception. If ministry leaders can learn the principles and practices of transparent discipleship, they will have the tools necessary to engage efficiently in ministry. I greatly anticipate that as the leaders and participant's ability to engage efficiently in ministry increases along with their continued personal growth, TMC will experience numerical growth. This project will take place through a six- to eight-week course in which leaders and participants will meet for one hour and discuss a prescribed topic that engages both their personal and spiritual lives.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Through sharing we all find a common ground, inspiration, hope, meaning, and ultimately, action.

—Women for One

Introduction

“I suffered from postpartum depression.” These words continue to resonate even after stating them almost two years ago on February 11, 2018, shortly after the Ordination Council conferred my ordination before the church. My reality at this time included preaching regularly as the co-pastor of a military gospel service and mothering a nearly one year old daughter. Although living to the best of my ability as though nothing occurred, I sought and received professional help in getting better. However, before ordination, being authentic and being myself was a struggle. Even after privately sharing this struggle with those in my inner circle, I took a leap of faith in publicly acknowledging my struggle before the very people who just conferred with the council that I was ready for pastoral ministry; essentially moving from being veneer to vulnerable and becoming the transparent disciple. That moment of vulnerability before the congregation led to the realization that transparency as a leader could lead to other opportunities to share my journey with others who had and continued to wrestle with mental wellbeing, and the overall desire to live a healthy and productive life in Christ.

Little did I know that sharing and continued healing in my story from the pulpit would lead to others desiring to share their similar testimony in the pews.

The impact that my vulnerability as a leader in the pulpit had on those in the pews still amazes me after transitioning from the pew to the pulpit. While being vulnerable as the Lead Pastor of The Message Church benefited the church, transformation took some time. February 11, 2018 is only one day out of many years of struggling with insecurities, frustrations, and private pain that eventually led to the understanding that an encounter with Jesus Christ could change the trajectory of life. The unnamed woman with the issue or blood or hemorrhage, as she will be referred in the body of this work, has the same story.

This chapter examines the chosen biblical text for this Doctor of Ministry project, which is the story of the hemorrhaging woman in Luke's account of the story found in chapter eight verses forty-three through forty-eight. While one finds this account in Matthew 9:20-22, and Mark 5:25-34, Luke's account captures minute details that impact the reader in understanding how the woman's story leads to the possibility of participating in transparent discipleship. Within the woman's story, this chapter examines the woman's dilemma, her determination for healing, her public declaration, and her deliverance that gives way to Jesus' pronouncing, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace."¹

This chapter examines the writings of Luke 8:43-48 as an examination of the vulnerability, transparency, and declaration of the woman with the issue or hemorrhaging of blood. In this chapter the reader will examine with great anticipation how the actions

¹ All biblical citations will be from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted, Luke 8:48.

of the hemorrhaging woman can impact and transform the behaviors and actions of church leaders and laity alike. This impact is desired to show and help one to understand how one's ability to be vulnerable before a crowd and how Jesus can lead to the discipleship of others or transparent discipleship. Accomplishing this task is possible by exegeting the pericope through the consultation of biblical scholars and other writers who extensively worked on the text. Following the exegesis of the text, the chapter further summarizes how the study of this passage is instrumental and foundational to the work of this Doctor of Ministry project.

Exegesis

Historical Background

The book of Luke found in the New Testament is the third book of the synoptic or similar gospels. Matthew and Mark precede Luke, which the author wrote in such a way that Mark Powell ask the question, “Can we imagine Christmas without shepherds or a baby in the manger? Liturgy without the Magnificat? A church without Ascension or Pentecost?”² Powell, in conversation with others, points out that unlike Matthew and Mark, Luke provides the intimate details of the ministry of Jesus in such a way that many of the stories read and cherished today would “be gone forever” if Luke failed to write his account.³ Similarly, Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder takes Powell’s observation one step further, drawing attention to how Luke speaks to the African American experience.

² Mark A. Powell, *Introducing the New Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 147.

³ Powell, *Introducing the New Testament*, 147.

Crowder writes, “The Gospel of Luke also speaks to African American spirituality, sociology, and history. The imagery is reminiscent of the coded nature of the spirituals and other slave songs.”⁴ Crowder’s point deserves emphasis. As an African American church plant, it is important for the DNA to reflect the Black church tradition and speak to the life and story of African Americans. While both scholars point out the importance of the imagery and details found in the book of Luke, both authors also point out the ongoing debate of the authorship of the books Luke-Acts.

Powell points out that two debates exist when speaking of the identity of Luke or the Luke-Acts writer. One debate says that the author of Luke-Acts is a traveling companion of the Apostle Paul, an educated man, and a physician or a medical doctor. Some consider this same man to be a historian who reported on ancient history with the likes of Josephus and Herodotus.⁵ In other discussions, Powell points out that some believe the author is an artist who goes on to create works known in history such as portraits of the Virgin Mary and other sacred and treasured relics of the church. Powell also added that scholars debate the ethnicity of the writer “whether the author is a ‘Hellenistic Jew’ who received classical education or ‘a Gentile’ who embraced the Christian faith in such a way it led to an intense biblical study.”⁶ Nevertheless, many would agree that the beloved physician Luke was probably a “Gentile.” Crowder adds, “Although the author probably did not name the work “Gospel of Luke” during its original composition and circulation, the book nonetheless bears the name of one who

⁴ Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder, “Luke,” in *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary*, ed. Brian K. Blount et al. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 158.

⁵ Powell, *Introducing the New Testament*, 147.

⁶ Powell, *Introducing the New Testament*, 159.

was deemed a companion of the apostle Paul and a physician.”⁷ Crowder’s observation shares sentiments with Powell’s view that the author was a man who knew and traveled with the Apostle Paul and was educated, thus leading to the extensive works completed in both Luke and Acts.

Regarding the composition and sources in writing Luke-Acts, scholars believe that the author wrote secondhand accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus. Both Powell and Crowder agree that the author of Luke-Acts writes in such a way that it is clear in his writing that he pulled from the firsthand accounts of Matthew and Mark to compose what will become the books Luke and Acts.⁸ Crowder goes on to explain that nothing in the body of the work itself definitively declares Luke as the sole writer, nor does the work give details as to the time in which the author wrote the book of Luke. Scholars noted, according to Powell, that Luke was written for widespread publication and for a broader audience.

After further study and reading the identity of the author of Luke could be the traditional person known as the “medical doctor” whose education enabled him to “code-switch for the common language to a more sophisticated Greek format.”⁹ The author could also be one or more of the Apostle Paul’s companions, but this chapter refers to the identity of the author as “Luke,” the physician who wrote to a Gentile community. Discussing the identity of the author of the book of Luke allows for the transition to

⁷ Crowder, “Luke,” 159.

⁸ Powell, *Introducing the New Testament*, 151.

⁹ Crowder, “Luke,” 159.

discussing the context in which the Luke wrote this book in conversation with the prescribed pericope found in Luke 8:43-48.

Like the debated identity of the author of Luke, the date in which Luke composed this book is also unknown. Donald G. Miller writes, “Both tradition and Luke’s precise knowledge of the church at Antioch connect him with that city. This does not mean, however, that he wrote either from there or *to* there. He may have written to the church at Rome or to one of the churches in Greece.”¹⁰ Miller goes on to point out that while Luke’s time of composition or origin of writing is uncertain, even the time in history is still in question. Miller notes that some of Luke’s writing indicates that the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 already took place, while others point out that during Luke’s writing, Jerusalem still stood. Nevertheless, Miller—like Crowder and Powell—emphasizes that while many unknown factors exist regarding the definite authorship, place, and time of the book of Luke, one must remember that the worth and work of this gospel does not rest on these factors alone. As Miller writes, “the worth of the Gospel for us in no way rests on this point.”¹¹ After evaluating the authorship, time, and place of the composition for the Book of Luke (88:43-48), this chapter next discusses the foundational text.

A Miracle Interrupted

Prior to the introduction of the hemorrhaging woman in Luke 8:43, Jesus returned to Capernaum and Jairus—the religious leader—approached Jesus. Prior to Jesus’ arrival,

¹⁰ Donald G. Miller, *The Layman’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Balmer H. Kelly (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1959), 15.

¹¹ Miller, *The Layman’s Bible Commentary*, 16.

Jairus' daughter fell ill and was dying. So, Jairus asked Jesus to come to his house to heal his daughter. Luke writes beginning at verse forty "Now when Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed him, for they were all waiting for him. Just then there came a man named Jairus, a leader of the synagogue. He fell at Jesus' feet and begged him to come to his house, for he had an only daughter, about twelve years old, who was dying" (Lk. 8:40-42). Shortly after Jairus makes this request of Jesus, and they make their way to the leader's home, a crowd continues to follow them. Unbeknownst to Jairus, a woman within the crowd who needed a miracle would interrupt Jesus' journey to his daughter that would lead to the raising of his deceased daughter from the dead as written in verses forty-nine through fifty-six. Thus, this story shows the interruption of one miracle by another.

The Woman's Dilemma

Beginning in verse forty-three, Luke writes, "Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years; and though she had spent all she had on physicians, no one could cure her" (Lk. 8:43). Luke introduces a nameless woman from the crowd who suffered for twelve years with what the text identifies as an incurable hemorrhage or discharge. This description of the woman's situation speaks to her social and financial dilemma. This hemorrhage in the Greek is "ῥύσις (rúsis) 'discharge' (G4511) is a flow (of blood), bleeding."¹² Scholars point out that during this time, the woman would have been deemed ceremonially unclean and unable to participate in temple worship or interact with others. Shaye J. D. Cohen discusses at

¹² Step Bible, "Luke 8," Step Bible, <https://www.stepbible.org/?q=version=ESV|reference=Luke.8&options=HNVUG>.

length the law as found in Leviticus chapter fifteen. According to the law, there are four categories of impurity caused by sexual discharge under which this woman would be considered unable to participate in Temple worship. The people would consider the woman in the text unable to participate in Temple worship according to the fourth category within the rabbinic law known as the “zaba...is the woman who has a discharge (oozes) outside of, or in addition to, her regular period; she is impure for as long as the discharge continues and for an additional seven days. After the seven days are over, she is purified through the bringing of an atonement sacrifice.”¹³

While the text does not speak to the specific location of the woman’s bleed (i.e. uterine, nose, etc.) authors Barbara Baert, Liesbet Kusters and Emma Sidgwick suggest that the woman’s bleed could have been a continuous “nosebleed” and not one related to her reproductive system.¹⁴ Nevertheless, Rahel Wasserfall adds to this conversation, stating that, “There was a distinction between a zava (a woman who has bodily emissions stemming from a disease) and a niddah (a woman who has the natural flow of her childbearing years).”¹⁵ Interesting as this point is, one is unable to articulate based on Wasserfall’s description the location of this woman’s bleed. Luke does not provide the age of the woman in the text, but only informs the readers of the length of her condition and the financial resources spent on seeking the medical advice of physicians.

¹³ Shaye J. D. Cohen, “Menstruants and the Sacred in Judaism and Christianity,” in *Women’s History and Ancient History*, ed. Sarah Pomeroy (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 274.

¹⁴ Rahel R. Wasserfall, *Women and Water: Menstruation in Jewish Life and Law*, HBI Series on Jewish Women (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999), 4.

¹⁵ Wasserfall, *Women and Water*, 5.

While Wasserfall's description does not capture the woman in the text, she does point out the following,

After the Temple period, the tannaim (rabbinic sages of the Roman period) and the amoraim (rabbinic scholars of the third to sixth centuries) "created fences" around the Torah to prevent inadvertent sins: The distinction between *zava* and *niddah* was eliminated because it wasn't always clear when bleeding was "natural"; in addition, days of "whitening" (days a woman had to count after her menses ceased and before entering a miqveh).¹⁶

After the destruction of the second Temple, a shift in the law related to purity and impurity changed and the laws focused more on the sexual relations than on the diseases whose progressions led to discharge and oozing that would render a woman ceremonially unclean. Wasserfall also points out that the laws around women, their menstruation, and their bodies essentially shaped the way women identified both privately and public, thus causing womanhood to be fashioned out of and around the Levitical laws.¹⁷ Wasserfall further adds that the woman would have to be separated from her family and community. Wasserfall writes,

Niddah, which comes from the word *nadad*, meaning "separation" or "being removed" (A. Kaplan 1982, 16), is addressed by one of the three biblical commandments aimed specifically at Jewish women. The restrictions concerning *niddah* were primarily focused on preserving the purity of the Temple cult (the first Temple, built by King Solomon in 1004 b.c.e. and destroyed in 586 b.c.e. by the king of Babylon).¹⁸

This further separation of family and community speaks to the dilemma this woman encountered because of her hemorrhage. Not only was the woman's dilemma due to her condition, but Luke's account discloses the woman's finances or lack thereof. Luke

¹⁶ Wasserfall, *Women and Water*, 5.

¹⁷ Wasserfall, *Women and Water*, 6.

¹⁸ Wasserfall, *Women and Water*, 4.

writes, “She had spent all she had on physicians” (Lk. 8:43). The King James Version reads, “And a woman...which had spent all her living upon physicians” (Lk. 8:43 KJV). The word living in the Greek is “βίος (bios) ‘life’ (G0979) (everyday) means life, or life; what one lives on, property, possessions.”¹⁹ The woman in the text spent all of her possessions seeking a cure for what the physicians were unable to cure. This woman spent everything she had, owned, and once owned to seek a cure that she never received from those in position to care and possibly cure her. This woman was in a dilemma and sought to get well.

The Woman’s Determination

The woman not only dealt with a dilemma, but as the text continues to develop, the reader sees her determination. Luke writes in verse forty-four, “She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his clothes, and immediately her hemorrhage stopped” (Lk. 8:44). This woman broke societal and cultural norms to push past her dilemma with a determination for Jesus to heal her. Crowder writes, “The heart of the matter is not the source of the woman’s ‘issue’ or hemorrhaging, but the fact that because of her faith she pushes her impure body boldly into an arena where even a healthy woman should not have been.”²⁰ Crowder, in concert with other scholars, acknowledges that the woman being in public or even attempting to touch a man that was not her husband was unlawful. Going a step further, scholars note that the woman’s attempt to touch a man in public was also unlawful. Previous sections of the chapter explained how the law required an impure

¹⁹ StepBible, “Luke 8,”
<https://www.stepbible.org/?q=version=ESV|reference=Luke.8&options=HNVUG>.

²⁰ Crowder, “Luke,” 169.

or ceremonially unclean woman to remain separated from her community and the Temple until the days of her purification. As mentioned in the text, this woman suffered for twelve years and was ceremonially unclean during that time. The law required this mandate to ensure that the people “did not defile God’s dwelling or tabernacle.”²¹

Even as one looks at the approach of the woman, she did not grab Jesus’ cloak as one may suspect in such a state of determination, but the text says she touched the fringe of his clothes. This word fringe “κράσπεδον (kraspedon) ‘edge’ (G2899)” translates to “edge, border, hem; tassel.”²² This minimal contact or touch in reaching out speaks to the determination of the woman. While this woman could have sought to pull, tug, or grab a hand full of Jesus’ cloak, the women’s actions point to her reality that though she was seeking healing, she was determined to remain inconspicuous. Scholars explain that the woman dared not touch Jesus as she understood her status as being unclean in accordance with societal norms and standards. Instead, William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker point out that the woman rather settled to touch “one of the four wool tassels which every Israelite was ordered to wear on the corners of his square outer robe (Numbers 15:38; cf Deut. 22:12) to remind him of the law of God.”²³ This woman even in her determination remained mindful of the order and laws in place and touched just enough of the healer’s clothing. Bible scholar Norval Geldenhuys writes, “Although this might be classed as superstition, she nevertheless had a fervent faith in the Redeemer, and

²¹ Cohen, “Menstruants and the Sacred in Judaism and Christianity,” 275.

²² StepBible, “Luke 8,”
<https://www.stepbible.org/?q=version=ESV|reference=Luke.8&options=HNVUG>.

²³ William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, vol. 11, *New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1953-2001), 454, Libronix Digital Library System.

thus she was immediately healed.”²⁴ Theologian Warren Wiersbe writes, “Her faith was almost superstitious, but the Lord honored it. She knew that He had healed others and she wanted Him to heal her.”²⁵ While both scholars view the determination of the woman through different lenses, both agree that the woman’s determination led to the healing found in the latter part of verse forty-four.

After touching the tassel of Jesus’ garment, the text reads, “Immediately her hemorrhage stopped” (Lk. 8:44). The woman’s determination through the single touch of Jesus’ garment after twelve years of suffering, led to healing for a lifetime. This woman’s fervent desire to see Jesus led her to not only a physical healing as the “hemorrhage stopped” but Jesus also spiritually healed her. Hendriksen and Kistemaker write that Jesus healed her soul along with her body.²⁶ This touch exceeded the physical healing received from Jesus, but it touched the woman’s soul. This immediate healing also leads to the woman’s restoration to participating in the religious life of her community, along with having the ability to have contact with friends and family. This immediately healing led to long-term ramifications in the life of this woman. In addition to witnessing this woman’s determination, one witnesses the woman’s declaration before the crowd.

The Woman’s Declaration

Luke 8:45-47 reads,

Then Jesus asked, “Who touched me?” When all denied it, Peter said, “Master, the crowds surround you and press in on you.” But Jesus said, “Someone touched

²⁴ Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke: The English Text with Introduction and Exposition and Notes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 261.

²⁵ Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 111, Libronix Digital Library System.

²⁶ Hendriksen and Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, 454.

me; for I noticed that power had gone out from me.” When the woman saw that she could not remain hidden, she came trembling; and falling down before him, she declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed (Lk. 8:45-47).

These verses speak to both Jesus and the woman’s public declarations. In verse forty-five, Jesus asks the question, “Who touched me?” Scholars point out that Jesus asks this question not because He lacks awareness of who touched Him, but rather, Jesus asks the question to bring the woman out of hiding. Geldenhuys writes, “The Saviour knew that she had come to Him and had touched His garment. He also knew who she was and that she believed and was healed.”²⁷ Jesus asks a question not for sake of gathering information, but Jesus asks the question to acknowledge the determination and healing of the woman. Jesus wants to ensure that the woman knows of His awareness of what took place even though others would fail to detect her covert actions of only touching the tassels of His robe or garment.

Shortly after Jesus asks the question, and Peter detests the possibility of identifying the individual who touched Him because of the throngs of people pressing on them, Jesus declares and discloses to Peter and the crowd alike in verse forty-six, “Someone touched me; for I noticed that power had gone out from me” (Lk. 8:46). Jesus allows not what one may perceive as covert actions on the part of the woman to negate the fact that power had left His body. Miller in conversation with Geldenhuys adds:

How Jesus was conscious of the power that had gone forth from him, we cannot know. He may have seen the woman’s act, unknown to her, then made her volunteer the information for her good. On the other hand, he may have felt the power going from him without seeing her act...His purpose in bringing the healing to light, even over the protest of Peter...lay in the fact that her healing was not as important as her personal relationship with Him.²⁸

²⁷ Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, 261.

²⁸ Miller, *The Layman’s Bible Commentary*, 93.

Both scholars note that even though Jesus makes a public declaration through asking the crowd who touched Him, Jesus is already aware of the woman, her situation, and her precipitating condition that led her to touch the fringe of His garment. This touch, then resulted in causing power or “δύναμις (dunamis) ‘power’ (G1411) power, ability; miracle;” to leave His body and heal the woman. The Bible uses this word for power over 119 times and is the same word Matthew and Mark use in their accounts of this story.²⁹ In this power of which Jesus speaks, there was a physical releasing from the Healer in which released physical power to the one Jesus healed—the woman with the hemorrhage.

In verse forty-seven, the woman makes a public declaration. Luke writes, “When the woman saw that she could not remain hidden, she came trembling; and falling down before him, she declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed” (Lk. 8:47). The woman’s declaration is a two-part admission to her actions. There was a physically expressed declaration through “trembling and falling down before Him” and there was a verbally expressed declaration in which she confirms why she touched Jesus. Trembling in the Greek is the word “τρέμω (tremō) ‘to tremble’ (G5141) means to tremble, fear.”³⁰ This woman has every right to fear being called out in a public space. Recall earlier in the chapter, Crowder and other scholars acknowledge the risk this woman takes in being out in the public and ceremonially unclean. So, to speak publicly was discouraged and unfavorable.

²⁹ StepBible, “Luke 8,”
<https://www.stepbible.org/?q=version=ESV|reference=Luke.8&options=HNVUG>.

³⁰ StepBible, “Luke 8,”
<https://www.stepbible.org/?q=version=ESV|reference=Luke.8&options=HNVUG>.

After shaking and trembling in fear, the woman fell before Jesus and made her public declaration of why she touched him and confirmed the healing that Jesus questioned in the preceding verse (Lk. 8:46). This woman became vulnerable before Jesus and the group alike and declares (“ἀπαγγέλλω (apangellō) ‘to announce’ (G0518) to bring news, be a messenger”) why she touched Jesus and how her touching the tassel on Jesus’ robe caused her hemorrhaging to heal after twelve years.³¹ Luke records the woman’s needed declaration to confirm publicly what she experienced privately. Geldenhuys writes, “If the cure had taken place without the Saviour making it known publicly, she would have had the utmost difficulty in removing from the inhabitants of the town the prejudice and scorn that she had met for years.”³² The woman in the text was already out of society’s good graces because of the disease that racked her body for twelve years, so for Jesus to ask and the woman come forward publicly in a space from which the law removed her for some time, serves as the Healer’s confirmation of the woman’s declaration. This public acknowledgement of what took place as Geldenhuys described would remove the prejudice received if the woman was healed without the source being named. After the healed acknowledges the miracle that took place, one sees the woman’s deliverance in the final verse of the pericope.

The Woman’s Deliverance

Luke 8:48 reads, “He said to her, ‘Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace’” (Lk. 8:48). Jesus affirms the woman publicly and then tells her to go in peace.

³¹ StepBible, “Luke 8,”
<https://www.stepbible.org/?q=version=ESV|reference=Luke.8&options=HNVUG>.

³² Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, 261.

This act of public affirmation provides the completion of the deliverance or an expressed opinion of the woman before the crowd. When Jesus calls the woman “Daughter,” He uses a term of endearment typically used toward a younger woman and a means to be cheerful.³³ Jesus tells the woman to go in good cheer for her faith made her well. Geldenhys writes, “In addition to stating, ‘thy faith hath made thee whole,’ He brings her to be a better realization that it is not her contact with the border of His garment that has healed her (in a magical way), but her faith... because she trusted in Him, she was healed by Him.”³⁴ Jesus wants the woman to understand that while she was healed upon touching the tassel of His garment, it was ultimately her faith in Him that led to her healing and becoming whole again before further instructing her to go in peace. This peace that scholars point out was absent from her life due to her incurable and chronic condition was now available to her. This peace with which Jesus tells her to leave was one of personal “acquaintance and open confession of him...this deeper ‘peace’ than that which mere recovery of health could bring.”³⁵

Jesus provided the woman’s recovery and total health thereby transforming her life, after the law limited her life to the societal and cultural norms of staying separated due to her incurable disease, because of her faith in action. Her touch of the tassel or hem of the cloak of Jesus led to her making a public declaration about her dilemma and reason for seeking the Savior. Jesus affirms her and makes her whole because she acknowledged Jesus’ question of who touched Him.

³³ StepBible, “Luke 8,”
<https://www.stepbible.org/?q=version=ESV|reference=Luke.8&options=HNVUG>.

³⁴ Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, 261.

³⁵ Miller, *The Layman’s Bible Commentary*, 93.

Intersection of Pulpit and Pew

Like the woman with the issue of blood, both the preacher and the pew member have a story to tell, and a personal struggle that calls for the intervention and healing of Jesus Christ. Though each person has their personal struggles, chronic issues, or distractions, the pulpit and the pew both share the desire to “be made whole.” Though the roles of the pulpit and pew serves in different capacities, one thing remains the same, there are imperfect people serving in those positions. The chronic health issue of the woman precluded her to live a fully engaged life within her community, but her issue did not preclude her from being healed by Jesus.

Both the pulpit and the pew share similar sentiments to be healed. Though this healing takes on various forms, one constant remains is the desire to seek Christ for an improved quality of life. Both the pulpit and the pew seek Christ to be better and to live in such a way that as they tell their story, they can point others to Christ, the one who saved them. The pulpit and the pew seek out Christ through continued engagement of worship within their faith communities and church. No one, like the nameless woman in Luke’s account is immune to the challenges of life. Whether it is the pastor or preacher, or it is the person serving in the pews, each person can anticipate at one time or another the need to seek their Savior in a way that will cause them to go to lengths and measures they would not typically engage in. The woman’s dilemma, determination, public declaration, and deliverance shows that Jesus is willing to meet people where they are even if society deems that location and space less than acceptable.

Though this woman suffered for years in private, in touching the cloak of Jesus thrust her in a position to become vulnerable and publicly share a portion of her story. Though Luke does not tell us the minute details, this nameless woman's vulnerability before Jesus and inevitability before the crowd is without a doubt an expression of the woman's passion to display transparent discipleship that will forever resonate in the minds and hearts of those in the crowd. This woman's story, though ended in the short pericope, has lifetime implications today and for all who read her story.

Implications for Ministry

The hemorrhaging woman's story has several implications for ministry. The first implication this story has is it speaks to the human experience. Although this story is based on a woman, this story can be applicable to a person regardless of gender. Though this story is often taught that the woman had a gynecological hemorrhage, research does not confirm this, often misrepresented, section of the text. If the preacher or teacher was to preach this text from the human perspective of a chronic illness or condition (i.e., diabetes, heart condition, infertility, poverty, low self-esteem, lack of confidence, etc.) this will allow the hearer to see themselves in the text.

This story also speaks to the influence and impact men can have on the lives of women in their families and communities. It is not uncommon for men to be afforded opportunities and positions, based on their gender. When reading this text, it is easy to bypass Jesus' humanity in favor of His divinity as He healed the woman. If one is to closely examine the text, Jesus was not only a man, but He was a religious figure. His position alone allowed Him to have influence in the communities He traveled in. Jesus

could have easily turned the woman away based on the cultural and religious mores, but His compassion toward the woman, showed the others they, too, regardless of status, can always offer compassion. The compassion Jesus showed in this text, particularly in communities when women are often dismissed or underrepresented shows that if a man is a position to help, they should do so.

In addition to men being able to use their influence to assist women, the church should recognize the power in people telling their stories. While all church services may not accommodate a time for testimony or storytelling, there should be a time in the life of the church of members and leaders alike to share their stories. The environment should lead itself to safety and security in what is shared. People should not feel ashamed to share portions of their stories. As read in the text, by Jesus asking who touched Him, this provided an opportunity to answer and share her story, her lived reality. Though the text does not speak to the impact the woman's words has on those in the crowd, one can imagine the impact the woman's story will have on a Sunday morning during worship.

Lastly, in further reflection of the text, the church should be mindful of the way they handle individuals who suffer from chronic illness or conditions. How does the church handle the mental ill, the poor, the chronically sick, the formally incarcerated knowing their lives have been or can be changed forever? How does the church handle the least of them? Both the pulpit and the pew must constantly ask themselves are they allowing space for those to share their story to provide compassion and affirmation to those who seek better.

Conclusion

While 'Luke' does not speak of this healed woman anymore in the text, and neither does the New Testament, one wonders how her life changed since encountering the Healer. Does this contact with Jesus lead the woman to share her story with others? Is the crowd changed after hearing and witnessing the woman's vulnerability and courage? Did the healing power of this man named Jesus encourage Jairus? Again, the text fails to address these questions, but the text makes one think of the woman's life after her miracle.

After further examining the woman with the hemorrhage, clearly her vulnerability before the crowd and Jesus enabled her to declare publicly why she sought Jesus. Based on the woman's story, without the woman taking the risk to go into public against the cultural norms, seeking Jesus whom she believed would heal her, and then publicly declaring why she touched Jesus' garment, transparent discipleship would not exist. Due to the risk, faith, and transparency in this woman, life as she knew it changed. This Doctor of Ministry project anticipates that when leaders and laity alike understand the depth of the woman with the issue of blood or hemorrhage, others will look at their own stories, and be open and willing to be vulnerable before Jesus and the crowd, as a reminder that it is not the crowd that Jesus is worried about, but the personal and intimate relationship with Him.

As members articulate their stories, they too can embrace this model of transparent discipleship. Even though unaware of the lives impacted by the woman from Luke 8:43, it is anticipated that through transparent discipleship the lives of church leaders and laity will be transformed. Also, these leaders and laity will also be

encouraged to assist with the leading of others to Christ based on their ability and willingness to be transparent and vulnerable while in the crowd.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

If the man may preach, because the Saviour died for him, why not the woman?
Seeing he died for her also. Is he not a whole Saviour, instead of a half one? As
those who hold it wrong for a woman to preach, would seem to make it appear.

—Jarena Lee

Introduction

This chapter describes how the women's suffrage movement, and foremother preachers and evangelist changed the landscape of how women were heard from the pulpits to the pews. This chapter further describes the Women's Suffrage Movement, introduces preaching foremothers Jarena Lee, Zilpha Law, and Julia A. J. Foote, and discusses implications for ministry. The chapter closes out with reflections in the conclusion.

The Women's Suffrage Movement

At initial glance, the reader may wonder why The Women's Suffrage Movement was included in this body of work. In the previous chapter, the woman with the issue of blood as told in Luke, chapter eight was highlighted. With the story, the reader was introduced to the woman's struggle due to personal challenges and public restrictions. Similar to the public restrictions placed on the hemorrhaging woman, The Women's

Suffrage Movement speaks to the struggle that women in American, particularly Black women endured during this period in the history of the United States. While the overall movement was successful in securing the right to vote for women, as history has shown time and time again, Black women had to fight and live in the “movement within the movement.” The following section will discuss the Women’s Suffrage Movement, the movement within the movement and how vital the women’s voice must be in both the pew and the pulpit.

When thinking of the Women’s Suffrage Movement, the words of Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor describes the history as, “a colorful and entertaining one, and a tale from which we can draw many lessons.”¹ It begins in the late eighteenth century, as this country's political, governmental, and social frameworks were only beginning to take shape.”² While the history of the movement is so eloquently described as “colorful” and filled with many lessons, one that can be drawn from its history is the need to understand its inception and how at the end of the movement, Black women were intended to have the same rights as their White counterparts.

The Women’s Suffrage movement was a time in the history of the United States and the world, respectively, in which women actively fought for their rights to vote. Prior to the active engagement of women fighting for their rights to vote was the abolitionist movement.³ This movement called for the ending of slavery, with the staunch support of

¹ Sandra D. O’Connor, “The History of the Women's Suffrage Movement,” *Vanderbilt Law Review* 49 (2020): 657, <https://scholarship.law.vanderbilt.edu/vlr/vol49/iss3/2>.

² O’Connor, “The History of the Women's Suffrage Movement,” 657, <https://scholarship.law.vanderbilt.edu/vlr/vol49/iss3/2>.

³ Joe Miller, “Never a Fight of Women against Man: What Textbooks Don't Say about Women's Suffrage,” *History Teacher* 48, no. 3 (2015): 455, www.jstor.org/stable/24810524.

many affluent women who were denied the right to vote during a World Summit. In the summer of 1840, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott while attending the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London, were not permitted to vote, but had to sit in the balcony while they watched the all-male delegates cast their vote.⁴ This notion as witnessed by Stanton and Mott was unsettling and did not bode well for the women as they returned to America. Steeped in the frustration of not being recognized, Stanton and Mott united to fight for women's right.

Author, Joe Miller notes that in addition to the frustration of its founders, Stanton and Mott, as the movement gained momentum, other things began to plague the movement itself. Miller writes, "...public relation problems and a lack of continuity in marketing and awareness."⁵ Awareness that what Miller was speaking of was applicable to the greater society. In previous writings, Ida Harper found that there were two groups of people opposed to the idea of women voting. Harper explains in her work that it was the men and the "Antis" who staunchly opposed The Women's Suffrage.⁶ Harper goes on to write:

In the face of this unparalleled situation people ask why the women of the United States do not make any more progression getting the suffrage. If such had existed in any of the countries where women now have the vote, it is very doubtful if they would have been enfranchised, for men are much alike in all parts of the world, and, in the mass, they do not believe in granting equality of rights to women. The conditions in the United States are intolerable, and it is a disgrace to our Federal Constitution that it gives one class of citizens the power to keep another class forever disfranchised, and this, too, by a bare majority vote. This most vital question, which should be decided by a superior, elected representative body, is left to the irresponsible masses, to a conglomerate of every nationality, every

⁴ O'Connor, "The History of the Women's Suffrage Movement," 657, <https://scholarship.law.vanderbilt.edu/vlr/vol49/iss3/2>.

⁵ Miller, "Never a Fight of Women against Man," 457, www.jstor.org/stable/24810524.

⁶ Ida Husted Harper, "Woman Suffrage throughout the World," *North American Review* 186, no. 622 (1907): 55-71, www.jstor.org/stable/25105981.

color, every degree of vice? Intemperance, immorality, ignorance, greed, dishonesty? To such an electorate as exists nowhere else on the face of the earth.⁷

Though Harper wrote this discourse in 1919, it is applicable as the reader that both in the United States and in the world, women had been disenfranchised and had to fight for their voices to be heard.

While Harper says that it was men and other “Antis” that were against the idea of women voting, Miller in conversation with Harper added that while it was some men who opposed the female voter, Miller adds that the history of the movement often neglects the opposition of other women to the movement, the uninformed voter, and the idea that civic-minded women had more power without the vote.⁸ In spite of the obstacles that impacted The Women’s Suffrage Movement, the continued fight and activism began to impact both the local and federal governments. The movement began moving at the state level, placing legislation on the ballots to include women voters. While this legislation was slow to move, eventually at the federal level, Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby signed the nineteenth amendment on August 26, 1920.⁹ While this move proved a much-needed victory in the woman’s fight for equality, particular in the voting booth, there was a group of women who would not be recognized until the passing of the twentieth amendment. This lack of recognition of Black women is what other authors refer to as the movement within the movement.

⁷ Ida Husted Harper, "Status of Woman Suffrage in the United States," *North American Review* 189, no. 641 (1909): 502-12, www.jstor.org/stable/25106332.

⁸ Miller, "Never a Fight of Woman against Man," 437-482, www.jstor.org/stable/24810524.

⁹ O'Connor, "The History of the Women's Suffrage Movement," 657, <https://scholarship.law.vanderbilt.edu/vlr/vol49/iss3/2>.

The Movement within the Movement

While the crux of the Women's Suffrage Movement was to secure and extend the right to vote to women, history negates the reality of the Black women in the United States. Recall in the previous section, even though The Women's Suffrage Movement was founded to fight for the right of women to vote, many of the proponents did not want to extend the right to Black women. Miller writes, "Senator Joseph E. Brown noted in 1884 that giving the vote to all women would mean giving it to two million Black women, 99% of whom could not read the ballot through no fault of their own."¹⁰ Though this was the statement of one politician, many, were not aware of this belief in the history. Paula J. Giddings as told by Trent Sydney described this paradox in this manner, "We don't yet have the story of women's suffrage in a way that shows Black women's impact and our significance in the movement...The story is the way it is now because Susan B. Anthony wrote it that way. That's the power of narrative — historians will go back to that story. The next thing we need to think about is how to re-narrate the story."¹¹ My attempt to re-narrate the story is to share this particular topic with the reader as the foundation for the project. The project is developed and understood through the lens in which I see history, as an African American woman.

Trent goes on in his work to highlight the risk and work of the founders of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated. The women gathered in preparation for the march on March 3, 1913 and even though they were told they could not march in front, the women

¹⁰ Miller, "Never a Fight of Woman against Man," 480, www.jstor.org/stable/24810524.

¹¹ Sydney Trent, "The Black Sorority that Faced Racism in the Suffrage Movement but Refused to Walk Away," *Washington Post*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/local/history/suffrage-racism-black-deltas-parade-washington/>. Evelyn Kirkley mentions the lack of the Black women's voice in the Women's Suffrage Movement, and the need for further research to be conducted to discuss the lack of representation in the literary.

stood firm from Howard University and marched in anticipation for the rights of all women to vote.¹² Trent further explains that it was other pioneers such as Mary Church Terrell, Adella Hunt Loga, and Nannie Helen Burroughs, along with the sorority's founders that stood firm in their belief for the right for women to vote. In addition to the courageous acts of the fore named women, Ida B. Wells, a member of the Illinois delegation and well-known Suffragist, allegedly forced her way to the front of the march with the other Illinois delegates; even though, she was told to go to the back of the march with the other women of color.¹³

Despite Wells being told she could not march in front, she courageously along with countless other Black women, was successful in dispelling the miseducation of the larger White society. She was able to secure the right for women to vote with the passage of the nineteenth and the twentieth amendment.¹⁴

It is appropriate to include in this discussion, as digression is made to the foremothers of the faith, that:

Religious arguments were not the primary line of defense for pro- and antisuffragist advocates but more often the third or fourth if on the defensive line at all. Attacks on the Bible by suffragists did not appear in the South as in the North, nor were frequent diatribes preached against the sins of Eve and her suffragist daughters. Protestant Christianity in the South did not intersect with woman suffrage as historians have shown it did with other social issues, such as slavery, prohibition, or evolution.¹⁵

¹² Trent, "The Black Sorority," <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/local/history/suffrage-racism-black-deltas-parade-washington/>.

¹³ Bonnie Berkowitz, "Things You Didn't Know (or Maybe Forgot) about How Women Got the Vote," *Washington Post*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/local/history/suffrage-facts/>.

¹⁴ Sharon Harley, "African American Women and the Nineteenth Amendment," National Park Service, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/african-american-women-and-the-nineteenth-amendment.htm>.

¹⁵ Evelyn A. Kirkley, "'This Work Is God's Cause': Religion in the Southern Woman Suffrage Movement, 1880-1920," *Church History* 59, no. 4 (December 1990): 507, <https://search-ebscohost-com.utsdayton.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rh&AN=ATLA0000833535&site=ehost-live>.

As one reflects on The Women's Suffrage Movement and the movement within the movement, it is necessary to view the parallel struggles the foremothers of the faith, particularly in the Black church tradition, had to fight to be seen and heard for the sake of the undeniable calling God placed on the lives of the women mentioned in the next section.

Foremothers of the Faith: Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw, and Julia A. J. Foote

In the following section, the foremothers of the gospel will be discussed to reflect how preaching and teaching in non-traditional pulpits impacted the people in the pews during their lifetime and today.

Jarena Lee

“If a man may preach, because the Saviour died for him, why not the woman? Seeing he died for her also. Is he not a whole Saviour, instead of a half one?”¹⁶ Those are the words of Jarena Lee, the first woman to be licensed and ordained posthumously in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) tradition, the first Black denomination in the United States. Lee's words as written in her autobiography as edited by William Andrews, was a testament to the struggles she found herself having in garnering the support of others, particular in the AME leadership, in recognizing and licensing her to preach and teach the Gospel.

¹⁶ Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw, and Julia A. J. Foote, *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*, ed. William L. Andrews (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), 36.

Born to free but poor parents in 1783 in Cape May, New Jersey, Lee was unapologetic about her call to the preaching ministry. Having been raised in a religious family, it was the age of twenty-one Lee joined the Philadelphia Bethel AME Church. It was during this church meeting she rose to her feet and felt she “had the power to exhort sinners.”¹⁷ It was shortly after this “call to exhort to sinners,” that she wrestled for four years with her calling and convention to preach and teach the gospel. This calling was so overwhelming that scholars note and even Lee herself shared that she suffered from suicidal thoughts and even attempted to end her own life by suicide.¹⁸

In the spring of 1811, Lee married Pastor Joseph Lee and to their union two sons were born. Shortly after she married, Lee, again felt the call to preach again and approached the founder and first Bishop of the formally organized AME church, Bishop Richard Allen. While Bishop Allen was familiar with the work of Lee, he refused to acknowledge her call to preach because of the “lack of doctrine” that permitted women in the pulpit. Instead, Bishop Allen, authorized Lee to hold prayer meetings in her home or she could “exhort(ing) congregations” after the preaching was complete.”¹⁹ While this was not ideal in nature, Lee did not grow discouraged, but took this as opportunity to do what God had called her to do, and that was to preach.

During her ministry, Lee’s husband died in 1817, leaving her to care for their two young sons alone. Even in the face of this challenging moment, the following year, Lee

¹⁷ Lee, Elaw, and Foote, *Sisters of the Spirit*, 36.

¹⁸ Many of the authors who wrote about Lee, speak about her struggle with depression and suicidal thoughts. This particular note was found in Lee’s autobiography as found in Lee, Elaw, and Foote, *Sisters in Spirit*, 4-10; Lee, Elaw, and Foote, *Sisters of the Spirit*, 36.

¹⁹ William L. Andrews, *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), 5, Project MUSE, muse.jhu.edu/book/3979.

traveled back to Philadelphia to speak to Bishop Allen about the prayer meetings and opportunities to preach in the local meetings. Though this conversation did not lend itself to increase preaching opportunities, it was in 1819, that Lee would see a shift in the attitude of Bishop Allen. While attending service at the Bethel Church, Lee felt the convention to rise up and preach. Lee shares in her memoir that when the pastor stood to preach, he was unable to speak, and it was as though the Lord told her to arise and preach. It was in that moment, she began “exhorting extemporaneously” by the given text.²⁰ While Lee was preaching, Bishop Allen was present and there to affirm her call to preach. It was then in 1819, Lee was granted permission to begin her itinerant ministry on the East Coast.

In her travels in 1839, Lee could often be found preaching and teaching with foremother Zilpha Elaw and other women of the AME tradition, who became known within the denomination for their dynamic teachings.²¹ Still convicted and destined to preach and teach the Gospel, Lee petitioned the AME Church during the 1849 General Conference for a license to preach. Unfortunately, similar to her first encounter with Bishop Allen, the motion was voted down for Lee and any women to be licensed to preach.²² While this was not ideal for Lee and others, Lee continued to travel describing her calling as “This subject (preach the gospel) now was renewed afresh in my mind; it was as fire shut up in my bones.”²³ With her renewed sense of calling and preaching, Lee

²⁰ Andrews, *Sisters of the Spirit*, 5.

²¹ Marcia Riggs, *Can I Get a Witness? Prophetic Religious Voices of African American Women* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 11.

²² Jualynne E. Dodson, *Engendering Church: Women, Power, and the AME Church* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), 90.

²³ Andrews, *Sisters of the Spirit*, 5.

would go on to continue her itinerant ministry. While little recorded activities are known of Lee's life after 1849, the AME church would go on during the 1952 General Conference meeting to vote down the resolution for licensing women to preach.²⁴

Though Jarena Lee died in February of 1864 and was never ordained by the AME Church in her lifetime, in 2016 the work of Lee was finally recognized. After the Council of Bishops meeting on April 8, 2016, Bishop John Richard Bryant, Senior Bishop of the AME Church announced that the council was to ordain Jarena Lee posthumously during the Fiftieth Quadrennial Session of the General Conference.²⁵ Though she was not alive to the public affirmation of the call of her life, Jarena Lee was, without a doubt, a foremother in the ministry for women across denominational lines.

Jualynne E. Dodson writes, "By her tenacity and success, Jarena Lee opened the way for the Church and the larger African American community to view the spirituality of women as a valuable resource."²⁶ It was because of Lee, and others, the voice and influence of women can be heard within the AME Church, both the local level and the national governing body.

Zilpha Elaw

Foremother, Zilpha Elaw, shares similar sentiments with pioneer preacher and teacher, Jarena Lee. Elaw, like her sister in ministry, is another example of what it means to be unapologetic to the call to ministry. Born in 1790, to free parents in Philadelphia,

²⁴ Andrews, *Sisters of the Spirit*, 45.

²⁵ World Methodist Council, "African Methodist Episcopal Church Posthumously Ordains Woman Preacher," First Friday Letter, <http://firstfridayletter.worldmethodistcouncil.org/2016/04/african-methodist-episcopal-church-posthumously-ordainsfirst-womp/>.

²⁶ Dodson, *Engendering Church*, 78.

Pennsylvania, Elaw was one of three surviving children out of twenty-two born to her parents. Elaw was the middle daughter next to an older brother and younger sister. Unfortunately, tragedy rocked Elaw's world early and at the age of twelve, she lost her mother during the birth of the twenty-second child. Following the tragic death of her mother, her father decided to send her to live with the Mitchel family, a White Quaker family that would serve as her guardians. It was within the first year of Elaw living with the Mitchel family that her father died at the age of thirteen. Having been so young and experiencing the loss of both parents and several siblings, Elaw was left wrestling with the unconscious stress of losing a majority of her immediate family. Elaw writes, "My father's death frequently introduced very serious reflections into my mind; and often was I deeply affected, and constrained to weep before God, when no human eye beheld my emotion."²⁷

Elaw, though involved with her guardians and their children in religious life, goes on to say, "...notwithstanding these seasons of serious contrition, my associations with the juvenile members of the family were too generally marked by the accustomed gaieties of a wanton heart. Our childish conversations sometimes turned upon the day of judgment, and our appearance in the presence of the great God on that portentous occasion, which originated in my breast the most solemn emotions whenever I was alone."²⁸ These conversations as described by Elaw was the beginning of the conversion she felt God was doing in her life in preparation to preach the Gospel. Though she continued to struggle with emotions and feelings, her guardians encouraged her to attend

²⁷ Andrews, *Sisters of the Spirit*, 53.

²⁸ Andrews, *Sisters of the Spirit*, 54.

the local camp meetings way from their Quaker meetings. Elaw, having these thoughts and needing answers, took it upon herself to attend the meetings and in attending, found that she would not leave the same. One evening as she is enjoying the service, she feels a strong urge to preach about Jesus. It was at the tender age of fourteen in 1808, Elaw joined what she called the “militant church of Jesus on earth” which she eventually learned was the Methodist Episcopal Society.²⁹

Shortly after acknowledging her call to preach, coupled with the needed conversion, Elaw continued to attend camp meetings and glean from the knowledge of the visiting preachers. In 1810, Elaw married fuller Joseph Elaw in which they had one daughter. While married, Elaw continued to be involved in various camp meetings and expressed in her memoir that her husband was not a fan of her preaching. In fact, he wanted her to participate in the drinking and dancing that he enjoyed on his time off.³⁰ Although her husband was not keen on her preaching, Elaw continued to attend camp meetings and in 1819 she “urged” other sisters to help spread the gospel.

In 1823, life took another turn for Elaw, and her husband died. In the year of Mr. Elaw’s death, Elaw decided to open a school to provide a sound education for the Black children in the town she resided. Though she was an educator at heart, Elaw shared that she closed the school in 1825 to do what God was calling her to do, preach the gospel. Elaw describes the decisions as “My delights were to follow the leadings and obey the dictates of the Holy Spirit and glorify with my body and spirit my Father who is in

²⁹ Andrews, *Sisters of the Spirit*, 57.

³⁰ William Andrews and Adenike Davidson both speak to the disdain Elaw’s husband had for her preaching and religious involvement.

heaven.”³¹ Elaw, like many of the foremothers discussed in this chapter held true to their calling expressed their desire to worship and serve God with their entire being.

If one will recall, earlier in the chapter, I noted the relationship of Jarena Lee and Elaw. Though both women began as Methodist, Elaw, unlike Lee, did not remain tied to the AME tradition, but became a non-denomination traveling evangelist.³² While traveling, Elaw was a risk taker in ministering in slave states in 1828. Though she was a free woman, it was in the south that Black men and women could still be caught and jailed for preaching and teaching. Though she was aware of this risk, she continued to preach and teach in various tent revivals and camp meetings. Though she continued to operate in her calling, it was in 1840, Elaw felt a call to work in the mission fields in England. Having no denomination support, Elaw traveled overseas, alone, and spent an undisclosed amount of time preaching and teaching while sustaining her ministry without denominational support. Elaw describes her trip as one taken on faith and God providing all she needed for the ministry in England.³³ As one reads Elaw’s memoir, it is believed she returned to the states in 1845.

Elaw shared with the reader of her memoir, “I affectionately exhort you to walk worthy of the high vocation wherewith you are called, shunning, carefully, the destructive vices which so deplorably abound in and disfigure the Christian community, in this day of feverish restlessness and mighty movement.”³⁴ It was in this call to walk worthy that Zilpha Elaw is a foremother of the preaching ministry of women.

³¹ Andrews, *Sisters of the Spirit*, 60.

³² Riggs, “Can I Get a Witness?” 14-15.

³³ Andrews, *Sisters of the Spirit*, 150.

³⁴ Andrews, *Sisters of the Spirit*, 52.

Julia A. J. Foote

In continued reflection on the lives of the foremothers in ministry, this chapter could not be written without the inclusion of Julia A. J. Foote. Journalist Janelle Alberts penned these words “Her momma said she shouldn’t. Her husband didn’t like it. Her pastor wasn’t thrilled. But Julia Foote felt she had no choice. She was called to preach, and preach she would.”³⁵ Like her sisters in ministry, Julia A. J. Foote was called to preach. Born in 1823 in Schenectady, New York, Foote was born to former slaves who were strong outspoken Christians who stood for justice. Though Alberts describes Foote’s mother as not supporting her daughter’s call to preach, both of her parents were known for speaking against their masters. As example of the boldness that Foote spoke with, Alberts found that both of Foote’s parents were examples of speaking out against injustice. Albert found that Foote’s mother spoke against her master by telling the master’s wife of the inappropriate advances he made towards her. Even though Foote’s mother was whipped and then sold, she spoke her truth. In addition to her mother speaking out, Foote’s father worked side jobs to purchase his family’s freedom as means to remove his family from the continued mistreatment at the hands of their masters.³⁶ Hence, there is no surprise that Foote would become the strong outspoken woman she became.

³⁵ Janelle Alberts, “Don’t Take ‘No’ for an Answer,” Christianity Today, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/women-leaders/2016/february/dont-take-no-for-answer.html?start=3>.

³⁶ Alberts, “Don’t Take ‘No’ for an Answer,” <https://www.christianitytoday.com/women-leaders/2016/february/dont-take-no-for-answer.html?start=3>.

Though free, at the age of seven, Foote was hired as a domestic worker because the school in her hometown barred all colored children from attending. At the age of fifteen, Foote converted to Methodism and at the age of eighteen, she married sailor, George Foote, in which they had no children. Shortly after getting married, Foote relocated to Boston with her husband and there she connected with AME Zion. It was there she expressed her desire to preach to Pastor Jehiel C. Beman. Beman opposed her preaching and immediately contacted the Zion officials. Though Foote petitioned the Zion officials “her petition was either ignored or rejected” thus resulting in her being expelled from her local congregation.³⁷

Though disappointed in the expulsion, Foote did not allow the decision or the lack thereof to keep her from preaching and teaching. In addition to being expelled from the church, Foote had to battle with her husband threatening to have her committed to a local mental hospital for her continued committee to preach and teach.³⁸ After both the accusations of a possible commitment to a hospital and exclusion from the local church, Foote began to have health challenges that left her unable to speak without throat pain for a few years. During her time of being away, Foote’s parents died in the mid-1850s. After the death of her parents and improved health, Foote continued her work. It was in 1869 Foote ministry continued as she traveled from California, New York, Ohio, Michigan, and Canada, in which she ministered for fifty years.³⁹ It was during her time of traveling, while in Ohio, she also participated in a holiness revival.

³⁷ Andrews, *Sisters of the Spirit*, 10.

³⁸ Emmanuel S. Nelson, ed., *African American Autobiographers: A Sourcebook* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., 2002), ProQuest Ebook Central.

³⁹ William Andrews and Marianne Jackson both discuss the span of Foote’s ministry and the locations she traveled.

As Foote continued her work in ministry, she described the opposition of women to preach and their strength to keep fighting as, “God will provide "supernatural" aid to the faithful that they might perform for Him those services for which their own feeble and unassisted powers were totally inadequate.”⁴⁰ In spite of the opposition Foote felt in ministry, she was committed and continued to serve. It was in her persevering and persistent nature; she was ordained as the first women in the AME Zion church. This ordination along with Lee within the Methodist denomination impacted the ordinations of women across denominational lines of years to come. In addition to her ordination, in Foote’s autobiography, *A Brand Plucked from the Fire*. Foote goes on to share that regardless of who bars women from their God given role, she says, “We may be debarred entrance to many pulpits (as some of us now are) and stand at the door or on the street comer in order to preach to men and women. No difference when or where, we must preach a whole gospel.”⁴¹ It was through the tenacity and fight of Foote that many other women would now be and are ordained in the AME Zion denomination.

Intersection of Pulpit and Pew

After further reflection on the Women’s Suffrage Movement and the identified preaching Foremothers in the faith, I found many uncanny parallels in both movements. The parallels in both the movements from the pulpit to the pew impacts the importance of those in the church. In the previous biblical chapter, Luke chapter eight speaks about the

⁴⁰ Marianne Thomas-Jackson, "Sisters in the Spirit: Black Women Preachers Hearing the Call," *Women's Studies Writing Center Review* 10, no. 1 (Spring 2005), <https://oaks.kent.edu/wcr/vol10/iss1/writing-center-review-volume-10-spring-2005.17-23>.

⁴¹ Thomas-Jackson, "Sisters in the Spirit," 20, <https://oaks.kent.edu/wcr/vol10/iss1/writing-center-review-volume-10-spring-2005.17-23>.

reality of a woman who was constrained to living alone with a chronic health issue that precluded her from participating in the life and culture of her community. Similar to the two movements examined in this chapter, women, regardless of their position in the church, whether they were fighting for their presumed naturalized right to vote or for their voices to be heard in the pulpit through prophetic preaching and teaching, both movements point to the reality that women, particularly women of color, have had to fight for their rights to not only be seen, but to be heard.

The preaching foremothers in the persons of Lee, Elaw, and Foote, are only a few of the African American women I was able to add for the historical context of this chapter. While there are more women who can be added to the litany of women in the faith, I found that each of the women mentioned shared struggles that are often seen currently in the church context both by preachers and pew members. Each of the women had a story in which they suffered death of loved ones, opposition from family and the church, and their own internal struggles to walk in their undeniable calls as given to them by God.

While the Women's Suffrage Movement has contributed to the passage of the nineteenth amendment, the movement itself, if without Black women, had to continue to fight for their voices to be heard. While Lee and Foote, are trailblazers in formally organized denominations, their fight has transcended denominational lines and has impacted women alike. The writer notes that when both movements are evaluated closely, it is noted that women had to fight for their voices to be heard in both the public arena and the religious sect. This oppression on both sides could have led to the demise and depressed nature of Black women throughout the test of time; but instead, it led to

women fighting for generations to come. Their fight is one that has laid the foundation for women to keep fighting both in the pulpit and the pews.

Implications for Ministry

Like the unsung heroes of the Woman's Suffrage Movement and the trailblazing women of the faith, both parties of ladies exercised an unapologetic approach to fight for the rights of women, but particularly Black women both in the polls and the pulpits. Though these women's experience was not captured by the history books, it is imperative that their hard work and undeniable strength be valued and captured in all facets of life. If not for the women, women in the church and in the community, they would continue to have unparalleled struggles to have their voices heard and their voices counted. When one thinks of ministry, the lessons gained from reading the stories of the Woman's Suffrage Movement and great preachers such as Lee, Elaw, and Foote, it is imperative that their stories are read and taught both to the parishioners and the preachers. The stories of both historical movements need to be discussed, and the accomplished celebrated throughout the life of the church.

In traditions where women are licensed and ordained, it is imperative that part of their education is the autobiographies of the foremothers of the church as sources of education and encouragement in ministry. The story of the Women's Suffrage Movement and the movement within the movement needs to be discussed in totality with the keen awareness of unconscious bias that can easily negate the Black women's reality. Each member of the local church and congregations need to be given the historical accounts of

why their voices can impact generations to come. Parishioners and preachers alike need to know their worth, their calling, and the value in knowing how to tell their story.

Conclusion

As ministry is evolving and women are working in various areas and serving in several different capacities in the life of the church, it is imperative for the church and institutions, at large, to see the need for the voice of women. If it was not for the fight and leadership of the leaders of The Women's Suffrages Movement and the foremothers of the faith such as Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw, and Julia A. Foote there would not be room at the table for women and countless others who are being called to the ministry. While one may not, that ministry goes beyond the four walls of the church, as it was witnessed in the Women's Suffrage Women, as heralds of the gospel. It is necessary for the women mentioned and countless other's stories to be told.

In the previous chapter, the woman with the issue of blood was selected as the focal text for this project because of her transparency when asked by Jesus who touched me. If by chance the woman did not speak up when asked by Jesus, one could only imagine the trajectory of the Book of Luke. Would readers be moved the same way with the miracle of Jairus' daughter in the conclusion of Luke chapter eight? Or do both stories of the hemorrhaging woman of twelve years and the twelve-year-old girl work in tandem to show that regardless of age or stage of life, Jesus can still use either story to touch the lives of others.

In touching the lives of others, imagine if the trailblazers and heroes in ministry did not march and fight for the equality of all women, what would the history of the

world look like today? While this chapter does not highlight the world-wide impact the courage and strength of the women displayed in America had, one could argue that the examples set have impacted women and various systems around the world. This is not to say that women in other countries were not fighting for their rights in various cultural arenas, the women in this work could stand as encouragement to those engaging in similar struggles.

Overall, the foundation of this project is to engage the reader in understanding the impact of transparent discipleship. The emphasis throughout the work has been placed on transparency to understand the need for one in speaking their truth. From the hemorrhaging woman in Luke chapter eight to the women highlighted in this chapter, each of the women did not shy away from sharing their struggle that led them to keep fighting for their voices to be heard in the moment and for years to come. Each of the women fought for affirmation and acceptance in times when societal structures would render neither. While this could have left them defeated and ready to throw in the proverbial towel, these women did not throw in the towel. Instead, they kept pushing and now their names and stories along with countless others are woven in the tapestry of history. While this this work does not exhaust the list of women in history who have shared their stories with countless others, their words and their work remained intangible encouragement throughout their years for many called to do the same or similar work.

In addition to encouragement for years to come, learning about such historical movements informs the preacher in preparation for ministry within their assigned context. This knowledge will serve invaluable as she or he are combating the continued social mores designed to covertly and overtly keep women, particularly women of color

oppressed and on the margins. Knowing the history of the Women's Suffrage Movement and the work of the Foremothers of the Gospel will cause one to learn that even when the environment and surrounding factors attempt to impede or stifle one's voice, the work they are called to do has greater implications than they could imagine. Although a lot of the women's history highlighted took place in obscurity, like the woman with the issue of blood, it was with the eventually sharing of their respective story, or a portion of their life and their life's work, that this project is able to highlight the importance of women's history, their voices, and also share with those who read this that their voices matter. It is imperative for the voices of these women and others to come to know their voices matter. Regardless of their position in the church or the community, their story is needed to be told and in telling their story this can lead to transparent discipleship.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender.

—Alice Walker

Introduction

This chapter describes how, Theology of Discipleship, Theology of Witness (Testimony) and Womanist Theology add to Transparent Discipleship. First, a Theology of Discipleship will establish the importance of discipleship for the local church and its implications for individuals and the church. In addition to discipleship, a theology of witness speaks to the importance of testimony as outlined in the project. Finally, Womanist Theology speaks to the African American's woman experience both in the pulpit and the pew. More specifically, the reader will gain insight on the feminist movement and the Women's Suffrage Movement. The reader will hear the voices of feminists such as Yolanda Smith and Emilie M. Townes. The development of Womanist Theology is also captured in this chapter as well as the womanist ethics. This chapter further describes Black Liberation Theology, the differences between feminist and Womanist Theology, and implications for ministry. Authors James Cone and Roger Olson views and perspectives are discussed.

Prior to the conclusion, the chapter provides a roadmap for the intersection of pulpit and pew. It provides greater insight on the overall implications of ministry as it relates to the womanist view. Overall, the chapter is designed to provide a theological framework for the project. It is also designed to provide a theological framework from the womanist perspective as well.

Theology of Discipleship

Author Preston Sprinkle defines discipleship as “becoming more like Jesus.”¹ In his book entitled, *Returning Discipleship to the Front Lines of Faith*, Sprinkle speaks candidly of the challenges churches and leaders are facing in their attempts to make disciples. In a report by The Barna Group, as cited by Sprinkle, the researchers found:

Church leaders, conversely, tend to believe the opposite is true (of discipleship efforts). Only one percent say, “today’s churches are doing very well at discipling new and young believers.” A sizable majority – six in ten – feels that churches are discipling “not too well” (60%). Looking at their church, only eight percent say they are doing “very well” and fifty-six percent “somewhat well at discipling new and young believers.” Thus, pastors give their own church higher marks than churches overall, but few believe churches—their own or in general—are excelling in discipleship.²

This general feeling of researched pastors and churches calls for a revamping of the traditional discipleship program.

While those mentioned attempts have been attempted through programs, Sprinkle suggests that disciples and discipleship are best done like Jesus: through relationships. He writes, “.... discipleship cannot happen without relationships. Deep relationships.

¹ Preston Sprinkle, *Go: Returning Discipleship to the Front Lines of Faith* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress Publishing Group, 2016), 2, ProQuest Ebook Central.

² Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, “New Research on the State of Discipleship,” Barna Group, 2015, <https://www.barna.com/research/new-research-on-the-state-of-discipleship/>.

Authentic relationships. Relationships where people can share their intimate struggles, confess their socially unacceptable sins, and rely on others for spiritual strength.”³ It is Sprinkle’s description of relational discipleship that builds the foundation for transparent discipleship.

As the foundation for transparent discipleship is developed, this idea to be more like Jesus, this notion of “becoming” as described by Preston, is further expounded upon by Lindy Black when stated:

Discipleship is knowing and becoming like Christ – living in vibrant, fruitful relationship with him. What we do (personally or with others) is to be a means, not the end. Even disciple making can become a project or activity in and of itself rather than a privileged participation in the work of the Lord. God uses friendships to bring an ‘iron sharpening iron’ effect.⁴

This iron sharpening iron effect is ideal when asking individuals to show up to the weekly sessions and have the accountability and responsibility to one another to bring out the best in each other through the sharing of their stories. Although this project is program based in its delivery, the overall goal is to teach and provide tools for the participants to take beyond the sessions and incorporate into their daily living. This program ultimately wants people to identify Jesus within their own stories and daily living and be able to share their encounters in such a way that it is relationship-driven and not transactional.

Sprinkle further develops this idea of discipleship by saying, “Discipleship is best fostered through organic (natural) conversations that love others as whole people in the

³ Sprinkle, *Go*, 43.

⁴ Sprinkle, *Go*, 49.

rhythm of life where we live out our faith. After all, that is what Jesus did.”⁵ This moving and loving as Jesus did and continues to do in the lives of His people, can be recognized when time and tools are provided. The goal of sharing Christ should always be based on relationships and not on mere transitions for the sake of numbers gained rather than souls saved. These relationships can only be fostered through Jesus’ modeled relational discipleship.

Theology of Testimony (Witness)

The Theology of Testimony, like the Theology of Discipleship, is a necessary component to the overall foundation of this project. There has to be a sense of ownership and personal investment by the hearer and the deliver when thinking of testimony. This ownership taken by the speaker carries tremendous weight in ensuring their understanding of testimony is based on their relationship with Christ and not solely on their account. This commitment to transparent testimony speaks to the importance of not only speaking a word but a word that is packed with the love and grace of Jesus Christ. This spoken love and relationship with Jesus are found in the words of Rev. Solomon B. Shaw. Shaw writes, “Multitudes have gone to heaven by giving heed to the testimonies and example of the righteous.”⁶

In his work entitled, “The Dying Testimonies of the Saved and Unsaved.” Shaw interviews and records the testimonies of 236 saved and unsaved individuals. While the interviewees varied in beliefs and faith maturation, the common thread in all their

⁵ Sprinkle, *Go*, 55.

⁶ Solomon B. Shaw, *The Dying Testimonies of Saved and Unsaved: Gathered from Authentic Sources* (Nicholasville, KY: Schmul Publishing Company, 2017), 1.

testimonies were a sense of peace as they recognized the finality of their lives. As stated by Shaw, these compiled testimonies serve as a reminder that many others have gone to heaven due to the testimonies of the transitioning. Even though the Christian faith teaches salvation through belief in Jesus and confession to obtain eternal life, those confessions can be encouraged by the testimonies of the saved.

In conversation with Shaw, editors Jennifer Lackey and Ernest Sosa further discuss “The Epistemology of Testimony.” Lackey writes:

Our dependence on testimony is as deep as it is ubiquitous. We rely on the reports of others for our beliefs about the food we eat, the medicine we ingest, the products we buy, the geography of the world, discoveries in science, historical information, and many other areas that play crucial roles in both our practical and our intellectual lives.⁷

This observation of the dependence on testimony by others further solidifies the need for a model for transparent discipleship to encompass transparent testimony (or story). While testimonies are received, Lackey and Sosa found that there must be a level of inquiry and observation when listening to the testimonies of others. They found, “not every expression of thought is appropriately regarded as an instance of testimony.”⁸ This is important to notate, as in the sessions, one of the topics for discussion will teach the participants what is a testimony, what is appropriate for a testimony, and the need to have boundaries when sharing a testimony.

In addition to learning what a testimony is, a self-reflection will need to take place. This is important as credibility needs to be established in telling a testimony, particularly when exercising transparency. Scholar Peter Graham writes, “When I accept

⁷ Jennifer Lackey and Ernest Sosa, eds., *The Epistemology of Testimony* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2006), 1, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁸ Lackey, *The Epistemology of Testimony*, 2.

what you say, I am also normally entitled to believe what you tell me. And if what you say is true and you are a reliable informant, then I am likely to learn something by relying on you.”⁹ This reliance that Graham writes about is pivotal when establishing a model for transparent discipleship. The “reliable informant” must ensure they are trustworthy and living in such a way they people they are speaking with not only hear them but trust the information being shared with them. Thus, allowing transparent testimony to pave the way for transparent discipleship.

In addition to theology of discipleship and theology of testimony (witness), Womanist theology adds to this body of work by highlighting the importance of hearing the stories of women of color and for others who are underrepresented in the body of Christ.

What is Black Liberation Theology?

“God is Black!”¹⁰ These are the thought-provoking and controversial words of the late James Cone, the Father of Black Liberation Theology, or simply Black Theology. Black Theology is part of a family of theologies commonly referred to as Liberation Theology. The term Liberation Theology is used to “refer to a family of theologies which arise within socially or politically marginalized communities, providing the basis for religious and social empowerment.”¹¹ This particular family of theologies was birthed

⁹ Peter J. Graham, “The Reliability of Testimony,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 61, no. 3 (2000): 695–709, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2653619>.

¹⁰ Roger Olson, *The Journey of Modern Theology: From Reconstruction to Deconstruction* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2013), 521.

¹¹ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 6th ed. (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2017), 74.

during various times throughout world history that showed that the voices of African Americans, women, and those in the Third World were not being heard.¹² It is in the development of the various liberation theologies that the Christian community now has Liberation Theology of Latin America, Womanist Theology, and feminist Theology.¹³

Though Cone is considered the Father of Black Theology, Roger Olson notes that there were several other Black theologians that voiced their concerns for African Americans before Cone did. However, it was Cone who became the most well-known within the chorus of voices.¹⁴ Prior to the release of Cone's work entitled, *A Black Theology of Liberation* a group of African American church leaders came together and released a statement regarding Black Theology to the public.¹⁵ Following the release of the unified statement by Black clergy and leaders, Cone's voice would continue to propel the conversation.

As Cone's work continued to guide the conversation on Black Theology, it was noted that out of his experience the voice of the Black woman was negated. Though Cone notes, "Unfortunately, American White Theology has not been involved in the struggle of Black liberation. It has been basically a theology of the White oppressor, giving religious sanction to the genocide of America Indians and the enslavement of Africans."¹⁶ It was argued by some in the academy, that in addition to the oppression of White Theology, the

¹² Olson, *The Journey of Modern Theology*, 504.

¹³ Olson, *The Journey of Modern Theology*, 506-507.

¹⁴ Olson, *The Journey of Modern Theology*, 515.

¹⁵ Olson, *The Journey of Modern Theology*, 516.

¹⁶ James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 40th anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 4.

Black church perpetuated this continued oppression within their four walls towards women.

This oppression of the Black's women experience, then birthed what is now known as Womanist Theology. Though Cone endorses that Black Theology cannot be possible without understanding its components of, "Black Experience, Black History, Black Culture, Revelation, Scripture, and Tradition" it was necessary for the experience of Black women to be included in the overall understanding of Womanist Theology.¹⁷ Womanist theologian, Delores Williams, criticizes Cone's lack of empathy or acknowledgment of sexism toward African American women and the continued oppression by not only society but also by African American men.¹⁸ Womanist theologian, Yolanda Smith, points out that even though Black Liberation Theology looked to speak to the plight of the Black person in American, unfortunately, the voice of the Black women remained unheard due to the challenges of sexism presented by Black Liberation Theology.¹⁹ With the identified challenges faced in Black Theology came the inception and birthing of Womanist Theology. In the following section, further evaluation of Womanist Theology will be discussed as a reflection of its importance in this theological chapter.

¹⁷ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 24-25.

¹⁸ Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 523.

¹⁹ Yolanda Y. Smith, "Womanist Theology: Empowering Black Women through Christian Education," *Black Theology* 6, no. 2 (2008): 206.

Feminist to Womanist

If one is not careful, there may be a thought that feminist and womanist are one in the same. For some this way hold true as both theologies fight for the voice of the woman. After further examination, it is without a doubt of the inherit differences of the two theologies.²⁰ In the previous chapter, it was found that during the Women's Suffrage Movement, many of the forerunners for the fight for women's equality were in favor of rights for women. However, what is often not discussed is the challenge that many of the Black suffragist had to contend with ongoing racisms and classism. This early delineation between the fight for women and the invisible and often ignored plight of the Black woman, led to the creation of womanism or what is known in the academy as Womanist Theology. Before the creation of Womanist Theology was the creation of Feminist Theology. Unfortunately, even in the development of both Black Theology and Feminist Theology, the Black woman's voice was still a faint cry in comparison to the forerunners of Black and feminist theologies.

Bible scholar and womanist Yolanda Y. Smith found that even though Womanist Theology resembles both Black Theology and Feminist Theology it is altogether different.²¹ Smith found that even though both Black and feminist theologies speak to the oppression of two often under-represented groups in the presence of Black men and White women, both movements were limited in speaking to the unique experience of the Black woman, particularly that of the Black American woman. Delores Williams as

²⁰ Demetria Hawkins, "The Fight for Social Equality," Digital Commons, https://digitalcommons.tacoma.uw.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1060&context=gender_studies. Demetria Hawkins discusses the differences between feminism and womanism or Womanist Theology. In her work she explains that the most visible difference is the fight for social justice and equality for women of color.

²¹ Smith, "Womanist Theology," 201.

quoted by Smith writes that Womanist Theology is “an attempt to help Black Women see, affirm and have confidence in the importance of their experience and faith for determining the character of the Christian religion in the African American community.”²² This yielded the thought and showed that the experience of the Black woman is often misunderstood when examined through the eyes of the Black male or the White female.

In concert with Smith and Williams, Emilie Townes adds to this dialogue that “Feminist Theology often reduced the variety of women's experiences to those of White, middle-class women, which, womanist theologians point out, does not address racism or classism.”²³ Aleksandra Izagarjan and Slobodanka Markov in agreement with Townes further point out that feminism “contained elements of elitism and cultural imperialism to infer that White womanhood was the norm for all women.”²⁴ These same scholars further point out that, “Womanism thus grew from an answer to the exclusionary practices of feminism into a larger form of political activism and became a tool for colored women with which they could not only challenge policies which marginalized them, but more importantly, provide the framework for the empowerment of colored women and women from ethnic minorities all over the world.”²⁵

Catholic womanist theologian Dr. Diana Hayes writes, “Feminist theology was critiqued for its claim to universality in speaking for all women but in actuality, failing to

²² Smith, “Womanist Theology,” 202.

²³ Emilie Townes, “Womanist Theology,” Vanderbilt University, 160, <https://ir.vanderbilt.edu/bitstream/handle/1803/8226/Townes>.

²⁴ Aleksandra Izgarjan and Slobodanka Markov, “Alice Walker’s Womanism: Perspectives Past and Present,” *Gender Studies*, 307, 11.10.2478/v10320-012-0047-0.

²⁵ Izgarjan and Markov, “Alice Walker’s Womanism,” 309, 11.10.2478/v10320-012-0047-0.

address or recognize the concerns of Black women and/or poor women regardless of race.”²⁶ Albeit that Feminist Theology attempted to speak for all humankind in the attempt to cover all, the Black women were not acknowledged. Many opponents of the feminist movement contend that because of its founding members being White Western American women, they were unable to speak to the struggles presented to Black women in American and to other women around the world.²⁷

These mentioned perspectives leave a clear understanding of the excusatory nature of Feminist Theology and how Womanist Theology was developed to represent women of color, particularly African American women. Keep in mind that as one thinks of the impact of Womanist Theology, Justo Gonzales found there can be a misunderstanding when one thinks of this theology. Gonzales found that when thinking of Womanist Theology, one must ensure to remain thoughtful of the context of the theologian but can be “misleading in that it implies that the more traditional theologies are not themselves contextual- that they have somehow been given quite apart from the settings of the various theologies, or their culture, class, gender, and ethnicity.”²⁸

The Development of Womanist Theology

It was not until the 1980s with the writing of *In Search of Our Mothers Gardens* Alice Walker challenged the feminist school of thought. It was in her own experience as a Black writer and literary genius, she found that the voice and experience of Black women

²⁶ Diana L. Hayes, *Standing in the Shoes My Mother Made: A Womanist Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 185.

²⁷ Hayes, *Standing in the Shoes My Mother Made*, 182.

²⁸ Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, vol. 2, *The Reformation to the Present Day* (New York, NY: Harper One Publishing, 2010), 520.

were often negated or left void of authenticity in literary works. It was in her writing she coined and is created with the phrase “Womanish.”²⁹ This term as discussed by several scholars was one to describe the actions of a young lady, particular an African American young lady who is acting like a woman.³⁰

In addition to coining the term womanish, Walker claims “for Black women a space of agency and meaning that was/is often denied to them by their larger cultures (society and church).”³¹ It was women such as Delores S. Williams and Katie Cannon who identified the claim made by Walker and contextualized the need for a space for Black women to be understood and exist in the context of the Christian Black church. “Prominent Black womanist theologians and scholars of religion – such as Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, Katie Geneva Cannon, Delores S. Williams, Emilie Maureen Townes, and Marcia Y. Riggs – bring womanist perspectives to bear on their church, canon formation, social equality, race, gender, class, and social justice. The impact of womanism goes beyond the United States and many women scholars and literary critics have embraced it as an analytical tool.”³²

It was the efforts of the named theologians and countless others that Womanist Theology was born and continues to transcend the world. This theology, unlike any other, was one that was not only for the wellness of Black woman in the United States, but is

²⁹ Izgarjan and Markov, “Alice Walker’s Womanism,” 309, 11.10.2478/v10320-012-0047-0.

³⁰ This term was discussed by Delores Williams, Izgarjan, Markov, and Yolanda Smith at length. This term was discussed by Smith as being “coined by Alice Walker was found to have come out of black folk tradition and found its roots in the term “womanish” as a term passed down from generations of mothers and daughters to describe the behaviors of a young woman.

³¹ Stacey Floyd-Thomas et al., *Black Church Studies: An Introduction* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), 92.

³² Izgarian and Markov, "Alice Walker’s Womanism,” 314, 11.10.2478/v10320-012-0047-0.

“concerned with the welfare and wholeness of the entire community.”³³ This concern for the wholeness of the entire community speaks to the communal nature of the Black women.³⁴ From the time of enslavement to the most contemporary times, Black women have been tasked with the responsibilities of rearing the children, running their households and at times the household of the Masters during enslavement, to being the sole provider in many households today due to the mass incarceration of Black men in America. This task and the undertaking of such great responsibilities is one that can be understood by the evaluation of the Black woman’s total experience. This experience is affirmed by Monica Coleman as she acknowledges the impact of mothering in the African American community, and the impact this has on women and their relationships with others and how they view God.³⁵

This ability for a Black woman to name her experience, such as mothering and other experiences, was particularly important in Christian theology as there was not a space or a place for the Black woman’s voice to be heard. While Womanist Theology pushes for the Black woman’s voice to be heard one must understand that this push is not a put down of others. Michael Battle in his work, *The Black Church in America: African American Christian Spirituality* emphasizes that even as the Black woman’s voice is being heard, “Such a naming process does not mean that there is an exclusion of other

³³ Floyd-Thomas et al., *Black Church Studies*, 93.

³⁴ Floyd-Thomas et al., *Black Church Studies*, 93.

³⁵ Monica Coleman, “Sacrifice, Surrogacy, and Salvation,” Cloud Front, https://d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/36530924/Sacrifice_Surrogacy_and_Salvation.pdf?1423173384=&response-content-disposition=inline%3B+filename%3DSacrifice_Surrogacy_and_Salvation_Womani.pdf.

identities just that all voices need to be heard.”³⁶ This ability to identify and provide a space and place for the voices of all to be heard impacts the way in which one is able to see and experience themselves in a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Battle, like others also affirms the work of Alice Walker in his reflection of Womanist Theology by sharing, “Walker used this term [womanism] to acknowledge the “right of Black women to name their own experience.”³⁷ It was Alice Walker’s term “womanist” that Black women were given a voice to name their unique experience as citizens in America. This claim as articulated by Walker for Black women to be given a space to name their experience was acknowledged and undertaken by Black women theologians and evaluated in conjunction with the Black church.

Womanist pioneer, Delores Williams, in conversation with her peers found that in Walker’s work there was the inclusion of the Black culture, experience, and stories.³⁸ This term in addition to Walker’s own rejection by the predominantly White literary community lead to the further examination and press of the Black women’s experience to transcend all areas of life.³⁹ Furthermore, Walker writes that, “A womanist is a Black feminist or feminist of color... Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender.”⁴⁰ This statement as highlighted by Townes speaks to the reality that if one considers themselves

³⁶ Michael Battle, *The Black Church in America: African American Christian Spirituality* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 179.

³⁷ Battle, *The Black Church in America*, 170.

³⁸ Delores S. Williams, “Womanist Theology: Black Women’s Voices,” Religion Online, <https://www.religion-online.org/article/womanist-theology-black-womens-voices/>.

³⁹ Townes, “Womanist Theology,” 162, <https://ir.vanderbilt.edu/bitstream/handle/1803/8226/Townes>.

⁴⁰ Townes, “Womanist Theology,” 164, <https://ir.vanderbilt.edu/bitstream/handle/1803/8226/Townes>.

as a Black feminist they are including their experience of being a Black women in which their feminist counterparts would not acknowledge.⁴¹ Though Walker articulates the womanist is a Black feminist, Williams further elaborates on this thought to say,

In making the feminist-womanist connection, however, Walker proceeds with great caution. While affirming an organic relationship between womanists and feminists, she also declares a deep shade of difference between them ("Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender.") This gives womanist scholars the freedom to explore the particularities of Black women's history and culture without being guided by what White feminists have already identified as women's issues.⁴²

While Williams, in conversation with Walker, encourages one to proceed with caution when deciding with whom to identify with, Williams points out that, "Womanist consciousness directs Black women away from the negative divisions prohibiting community building among women. The womanist loves other women sexually and nonsexually."⁴³ This conscience that Williams speaks of is one that other scholars note speaks to the difference of feminist and womanist theologies. There is an inclusion that is often not found in the writings or fight by feminist. As one continues to grow and understand Womanist Theology, one must evaluate the continued work of pioneers such as Jarena Lee, Sojourner Truth, Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, Delores S. Williams, Katie Cannon, Shawn Copeland, Jacquelyn Grant, Kelly Brown Douglas, Keri Day, and Diana

⁴¹ Townes, "Womanist Theology," 164, <https://ir.vanderbilt.edu/bitstream/handle/1803/8226/Townes>.

⁴² Williams, "Womanist Theology," 4, <https://www.religion-online.org/article/womanist-theology-black-womens-voices/>.

⁴³ Williams, "Womanist Theology," 4, <https://www.religion-online.org/article/womanist-theology-black-womens-voices/>.

Hayes to name a few. These are some of the founding members and current voices of what we now recognize as Womanist Theology or womanism.⁴⁴

Theologian Eboni Turman writes:

Womanist Theology is a diamond with several facets, which were first illuminated in the work of Cannon (ethics), Grant (theology), Williams (theology), Weems (Bible), and Townes (ethics). It has evolved in some ways since its early days, returning to Williams's fundamental hermeneutical question about whose voices are missing—and giving increasingly broader answers. Yet it remains committed to its original orientation: a concern for the Black church and community, the privileging of Black women's experiences, an intersectional perspective that sees oppression as multidimensional, and a blunt interrogation of doctrine and prior theological claims.⁴⁵

Theologian Raphael Warnock, in agreement with Turman, found that it is imperative for the church, particularly the Black church to acknowledge and address the oppressive and systemic structures that continue to limit the voice and movement of the Black women.⁴⁶

In recognition of these systems, such as sexism, Warnock writes, "...by positing a multidimensional methodology that unmask the hidden demons of sexism in Black church polity and orthodox Christian speech, womanist ecclesiology is providing critical markers for continuing dialogue between pastors and theologians about the future of

⁴⁴ Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, vol. 1, *The Reformation to the Present Day* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 2010), 520. Dianne Stewart in "Womanist God-Talk on the Cutting Edge of Theology and Black Religious Studies" names other pioneers of the Womanist movement.

⁴⁵ Eboni Marshall Turman, "Womanist Theology and How It Has Evolved: Black Women's Wisdom," *Christian Century* 136, no. 6: 31.

⁴⁶ Raphael G. Warnock, *The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety, and Public Witness* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2013), 157, Project MUSE, muse.jhu.edu/book/26972. Alexis D. Abernathy agrees with Warnock and Turman in that the leadership in churches should include women. She contends that when women in leadership reflects inclusivity and representation that is essential to Womanist Theology. Alexis D. Abernathy, "Women's Leadership in the African American Church," Black Women in Leadership, Fuller Studio, <https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/womens-leadership-in-the-african-american-church/>.

liberation's mission outside and inside the church walls."⁴⁷ Warnock, like many other womanist theologians, points out the importance of women and their impact in the church. Though Warnock points to the reality of the uncharged Black church, he found that when leaders and church alike seek to provide a space and place for women, there must be an understanding that her experience will include a personal level of piety, God-self talk, and spiritually. If these factors are not addressed or considered when developing sermons, programs, and other activities within the church, there will be a continued loss of the hermeneutic of the woman.⁴⁸

In addition to speaking to the experience of the Black women in the church, Yolanda Smith found, like Warnock, there must be intentionality in the planning and execution of Christian education within the church. Not only does one have to hear the experience of the Black woman, but they must take it and structure activities and education to further solidify and affirm the lived experiences of the women in their congregations and communities alike.⁴⁹

Knowing that most of the Christian education takes place on Sunday mornings in churches across the nation, it is imperative as noted by one theologian for pastors and leaders to become educated on who to continue the discussion of Womanist Theology.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Warnock, *The Divided Mind of the Black Church*, 172, Project MUSE, muse.jhu.edu/book/26972.

⁴⁸ Warnock, *The Divided Mind of the Black Church*, 172, Project MUSE, muse.jhu.edu/book/26972; Roger Olson also speaks to the experience of the black woman and the need for church and institutions alike to be mindful of their varied experiences. Roger Olson, *The Journey of Modern Theology: From Reconstruction to Deconstruction* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2013), 523.

⁴⁹ Smith, "Womanist Theology," 200–220.

⁵⁰ Smith, "Womanist Theology," 202.

Smith believes that Womanist Theology can provide insight for empowering the Black woman through Christian education.⁵¹ The need for education can impact the way women see and experience Christ. As part of any Christian education, it is vital that the person learning can identify themselves in the Christian narrative. This ability for one to see themselves is a necessary component within Liberation Theology. Womanist Theology has also drawn on, similar to Black Theology, the tradition of the church, dance, folklore, history, music, and scripture to speak to not only the experience of the woman but to also assist in the process being able to name the oppressor and the oppressed.⁵² Smith goes on to say that it is through formal and informal education that women can be empowered to think for themselves and challenge the systems that once oppressed them. Smith points out that education goes beyond the academy but permeates every area of the life of the community. From Sunday school teaching to Sunday morning worship, the interactions of women within their communities' impact and empower their ability to move forward.⁵³ Smith contends that ultimately Womanist Theology can impact Christian education through practical yet effective means.⁵⁴

In addition to a reformation of Christian education, Womanist Theology has provided an outlet for women to speak to the plight of the Black woman. Without an active voice in theology, the Black woman though the "backbone of the church" as described by Ann Braude was forced to remain quiet and not be acknowledged for the

⁵¹ Smith, "Womanist Theology," 201.

⁵² Olson, *The Journey of Modern Theology*, 523.

⁵³ Smith, "Womanist Theology," 201.

⁵⁴ Smith, "Womanist Theology," 220.

impact she made on the church.⁵⁵ From the time of enslavement on North American soil to the current day, Black women have been called to lead their families, community activities, and other social entities that impact the lives of everyone. Unfortunately, in their leading, they have been made to feel less than, forced to succumb to the patriarchal systems that continue to perpetuate the hatred and silence of Black women and the ramifications of sexism.

Womanist Theology has also pushed the Church to address social issues that were once left for the “secular” community to address. Social conditions such as “HIV/AIDS, homelessness, poverty, poor health care and the lack of access to care, prison overcrowding, and economic disparities” has caused the Church to take a closer look at what can be done.⁵⁶ This attention to the social condition of the world causes churches to become as described by Smith as “multi-dimension.”⁵⁷ This “multi-dimension” is one that is necessary for the Church to continue to remain relevant and to address the needs of the community without placing one’s self in the position of the oppressed.

Roger Olson adds to this conversation by stating, “Womanist Theology is a theology that places “Black women’s experience and ideas at the center of analysis.”⁵⁸ This analysis as pointed out in the development of the theology allows for the Black woman’s voice to be heard and her experience, particularly as a woman in American to be recognized. Olson goes on to say, “Womanist Theology combined insights of Feminist

⁵⁵ Ann Braude, *Sisters and Saints: Women and American Religion* (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1.

⁵⁶ Smith, “Womanist Theology,” 217.

⁵⁷ Smith, “Womanist Theology,” 218.

⁵⁸ Olson, *The Journey of Modern Theology*, 523.

Theology with Black Theology to formulate a unique Liberation Theology based on Black women's experience of oppression at the hands of White and Black males and White women."⁵⁹ To make the Black women's experience and ideas the center of the purpose of Womanist Theology is to take the Black tradition of "music, literature, dance, slave narrative, and poetry" and apply it to the whole person.⁶⁰

In applying the aforementioned categories of seeing the whole person, Izgarian and Markov interject by pointing out that, "At the center of womanism is the concern for women and their role in their immediate surroundings (be it family, local community or work place) and more global environment...and is committed to "survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female" (Walker 1983:xi)."⁶¹ There is a great need for the understanding that womanist theologians are concerned for the well-being of all which is another delineating factor from its feminist counterpart. Sandra Barnes writes:

Other characteristics of this theology include the poor Black woman as a Christ figure; liberation for all oppressed peoples; and affirmation of the lives, experiences, contributions, and survival strategies of African female ancestors (Battle 2006; Cannon 1988; Coleman 2008; Harris-Perry 2013; Mitchem 2002; Thomas 2004a; Wright 2004). Like Black Liberation Theology, womanism reframes scripture to critique oppressive societal structures, promotes individual and collective change, and fosters inclusivity. Womanism also points an intersectional lens on the failures of society to acknowledge how the nexus of race and gender manifest in uniquely different conditions, experiences, and often deleterious outcomes for Black women.⁶²

⁵⁹ Olson, *The Journey of Modern Theology*, 523.

⁶⁰ Smith, "Womanist Theology," 206.

⁶¹ Izgarian and Markov, "Alice Walker's Womanism," 305, 11.10.2478/v10320-012-0047-0.

⁶² Sandra L. Barnes, "Black Megachurches and Gender Inclusivity," *Women, Gender, and Families of Color* 3, no. 2: 115-143, doi:10.5406/womgenfamcol.3.2.0115.

Barnes like others, speaks to the need for the church to evaluate all sections of their organization in order to fully engage in Womanist Theology. In addition to the education in church, Anthony Reddie writes:

The priority given to experience as a key hermeneutical device for interpreting and reinterpreting the Scriptures and the traditions that arise from these foundational texts is a central tenet of Womanist Theology. The privileging and prioritizing of Black women's experience become a powerful mechanism for affirming the subjectivity of those who are marginalized and oppressed and providing a means by which traditionally patriarchal structures and Androcentric dominant discourses can be reread and even subverted.⁶³

In addition to scriptures, context, and the Black woman experience, one must also reflect on the womanist ethics in which will be explained briefly in the following section.

Womanist Ethics

Ethics are the guiding principles that guide the practice of theology. Womanist ethics guide the practice of womanism. Theologians Stacy and Juan Floyd-Thomas acknowledge that womanist ethicists came out of a time when women did not have a voice. They found that it was out of the womanist movement that women were taught to be self-reliant, name those people, places, and things that once oppressed them, and now work diligently to dismantle the very systems that once held them hostage. Dr. Stacey Floyd-Thomas writes, "Womanist ethics brings together virtue ethics and liberation ethics to liberate Black women from interlocking systems of oppression... to engage in Womanist ethics is to name the oppression that disrupts lives, wounds souls, destroys

⁶³ Anthony Reddie, *Black Theology in Transatlantic Dialogue* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 90, ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=307643>.

communities, and forestall liberation.”⁶⁴ It is out of these guiding principles that womanist theologians are able to articulate and speak about the interlocking systems of oppression put in place by society through the larger social structure that causes the continued oppression of Black women.⁶⁵ In acknowledging these systems, women are taught how to name the oppression and dismantle the systems that continue to press them down. This ability to name what is holding one down speaks to the hallmark characteristic of Liberation Theology in empowering the oppressed to speak of the oppression and move toward wholeness.⁶⁶

Ethicist Joan Martin author of “From Womanist Theology to Womanist Ethics: The Contribution of Delores S. Williams,” Martin is observed placing her work of womanist ethics in conversation with the work of theologian Delores S. Williams. She found that it is necessary for all of the social structures and theologies to come together to work against the systems that continue to hold down the marginalized and underrepresented communities. Martin writes, “All of these social policy issues and dynamics of race, gender, and class provide ample possibilities for collaborative work between womanist, Black male liberation, and White, Asian, Hispanic American and mujerista feminist theologians and ethicists.”⁶⁷ To see how social policy issues are faced by contemporary culture speak to the need for a collaborative effort to be undertaken to continue the ultimate work of freedom and equality for the oppressed. Though a

⁶⁴ Floyd-Thomas et al., *Black Church Studies*, 141.

⁶⁵ Floyd-Thomas et al., *Black Church Studies*, 141.

⁶⁶ Rolson, *The Journey of Modern Theology*, 520.

⁶⁷ Joan M. Martin, “From Womanist Theology to Womanist Ethics: The Contribution of Delores S. Williams,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 58, no. 3-4 (2004): 203-212.

monumental task, this is one that Womanist Theology can complete through the lens of justice for all that is bound by societal pressures and structures.

Intersection of Pulpit and Pew: Implications for Ministry

In reflection of the intersection of the pulpit and the pew, several factors must be considered. When reflecting on a Theology of Discipleship, there must be an understanding that discipleship is based on becoming more like Jesus and having genuine relationships with people, rather than being transactional.⁶⁸ This is a behavior that has to be present and practiced by everyone regardless of the position held in church. This said behavior of acting more like Jesus lays a foundation for Transparent Testimony which emulates from a place of vulnerability. It allows the person to build a level of trust between the hearer and deliver of the story as found in the Theology of Testimony (Witness). Another “of the important facets of Womanist Theology is the attention given to participation and interaction.”⁶⁹ This attention is imperative for the overall voices and stories of the women to be heard. While this project will be open to the leadership of the identified church, it is important to note that Womanist Theology is an inclusive theology that can include both men and women. As previously mentioned, Womanist Theology identifies and acknowledges the efforts of the Black women as she cares for herself and her entire community. Dr. Hayes writes, “Womanist Theology today is expanding beyond these critiques and emerging as a theological voice for Black and other women of color

⁶⁸ Sprinkle, *Go: Returning Discipleship to the Front Lines of Faith*, 49.

⁶⁹ Reddie, *Black Theology in Transatlantic Dialogue*, 110, ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=307643>.

around the world who are both Christian and of other religions.”⁷⁰ The ability to transcend racial and religious works speaks to the impact that Womanist Theology is having on the world alike. Scholar Serene Jones writes, “I hope it (Womanist Theology) will continue this commitment to writing readable, beautiful, interesting theology that people both inside and outside the academy can and will read. To be a concretely transformative theology.”⁷¹

Womanist Theology causes both the reader and the listener to be challenged both in the academy and in the church. Seeing that womanist is a holistic approach to ministry, it is necessary for the preachers, teachers, leaders, and denominational leaders to identify who is in the pulpit and understand that there is more to them that meets the eye. There is a grave need, particularly in predominately African American churches and for multi-racial churches to educate themselves not only to the experience of the Black woman, but to have an inclusive view of all people of color. Being able to acknowledge the different experiences that come along with being a person of color in America, brings its challenges and its tributes, both that need to be evaluated and spoken to in pulpit and in the pew. There is also the need for clergy and lay members to familiarize themselves with womanist theologians, their work, and the capacity of their respective congregation’s willingness to learn more about women of color and their lived experience.

⁷⁰ Hayes, *Standing in the Shoes My Mother Made*, 182.

⁷¹ Jones, “Reading on the Bus,” 185-193.

Conclusion

From biblical times to the current age, it is without question that the stories and experiences of women of color have gone in silence. If it was not for the courage and boldness of literature genius Alice Walker to call out the lack of representation and the current theological work of Jacqueline Grant and Delores Williams to show that same lack of representation in the academy, women of color would not have the voice it has today. While the field and many others have a way to go before Black women are seen as equal both in the pew and the pulpit, one can contend the evolving body of Womanist Theology will continue to challenge the status quo both in the pulpit and the pew. Even in reflecting in this work, it is necessary to notate the connections made between the chapters are fluid and show the connection and importance of representation and the power of sharing one's story.

Like the woman with the issue of blood, the suffragists, and the foremothers of the faith, and now the guiding principles of Womanist Theology, to include the experience of the woman, is a strategic move in ensuring that the voice of the underrepresented is heard and through transparent discipleship others can hear various stories and find the courage to share their own stories with others. Like the various chapters in this work, the inclusion of such theology further solidifies the need for theologians and church leaders to view people as holistic beings that cannot negate their lived experience from their faith.

Serene Jones writes womanism is available to not only the academy but also be available to the woman busy running errands while riding on the city bus.⁷² Jones writes,

⁷² Jones, "Reading on the Bus," 185-193.

“I hope it (Womanist Theology) will continue this commitment to writing, readable, beautiful, interesting theology that people both inside and outside the academy can and will read to concretely transformative theology.”⁷³ Jones like others want readers alike to know that womanism is not only for the academy, but womanism is for all who have been unrepresented and they, now have a voice that sounds and looks like them. A voice that they recognize that speaks their language and a voice they can identify.⁷⁴

⁷³ Jones, “Reading on the Bus,” 190.

⁷⁴ Jones, “Reading on the Bus,” 190.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

Don't believe everything you think.

— Unknown

Introduction

This chapter describes how mental health and perceptions in the African American community will impact the overall project of transparent discipleship. This chapter further describes social work, mental health in the African American context, and implications for ministry before providing a conclusion.

Why Social Work?

After much reflection on what field of study outside of theology would best suit this project, social work was selected with an emphasis on mental health in the African American context. As a reminder, the project is focused on a predominately African American church start, less than three years old, based in San Antonio, Texas. Though the church in which the project will be facilitated is new, social work is not. Social work has been around since the late nineteenth century both in Europe and America as the volunteer efforts of countless people rose to answer the social question that was based on the "... the paradox of increasing poverty in an increasingly productive and prosperous

economy.”¹ This question led to both men and women raising to assist in meeting the needs of the surrounding communities.

In this response, the beginning of social work was often associated with poverty with individual and community.² While this association was an outgrowth of the immediate needs of the community, even today, when one hears the term “social work,” there is a natural inclination to think of child protective services, food stamps, and other government-run entities or non-profit organizations directly related to poverty. In fact, social work offers more than what one may think. Social work and its professionals can be found in a variety of roles in the community. When evaluating the field, social work deals with three levels or systems: micro, mezzo, and macro. The micro system works with the individual/person; the mezzo system evaluates the individual/person in relationship to systems or structures such as family, community, work, and larger systems. The macro system evaluates organizational structures and how to make systemic changes through policy reform, procedures, and governmental policies for wide-scale change that directly impact the mezzo and micro systems.³

Social worker Paul Stuart found in his historical writing that as the field identified its niche and role in the community, it was in the 1930s the Census classified social work

¹ Paul H. Stuart, “Social Work Profession: History,” Oxford Research Encyclopedias, 8, <https://oxfordre.com/socialwork/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199975839.001.0001/acrefore-9780199975839-e-623?print=pdf>.

² Stuart, “Social Work Profession,” 1, <https://oxfordre.com/socialwork/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199975839.001.0001/acrefore-9780199975839-e-623?print=pdf>.

³ Social Work Guide, “Micro Mezzo Macro,” Social Work Guide, <https://www.socialworkguide.org/resources/micro-vs-mezzo-vs-macro-social-work/>.

as a profession.⁴ This classification leads to colleges and schools' formation offering formal training to people who once worked as volunteers to be trained and receive nationally recognized credentials for their formal training.⁵ Unfortunately, in the formal establishment of social work as a bona fide profession, African Americans, particularly those residing in the South, were unable to attend higher learning institutions until the establishment of Historical Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).⁶ Iris Carlton-Laney found in her work, "African American Social Welfare," before HBCU's were established, many African Americans came together to assist their own communities by establishing social clubs, settlement houses, mutual benefits clubs, and the Women's Club Movement.⁷ She wrote, "This Afrocentric perspective embraced the interconnectedness of all things—mind, body, and spirit—as well as the emphasis of the group over the individual. This group identity contributed to the establishment and growth of social institutions, including churches, secret orders, and mutual aid societies."⁸

⁴ Stuart, "Social Work Profession," 1, <https://oxfordre.com/socialwork/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199975839.001.0001/acrefore-9780199975839-e-623?print=pdf>.

⁵ Stuart, "Social Work Profession," 1, <https://oxfordre.com/socialwork/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199975839.001.0001/acrefore-9780199975839-e-623?print=pdf>.

⁶ Iris Carlton-Laney, "African American Social Welfare History," Oxford Research Encyclopedias, 1, <https://oxfordre.com/socialwork/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199975839.001.0001/acrefore-9780199975839-e-841?print=pdf>.

⁷ Carlton-Laney, "African American Social Welfare History," 1, <https://oxfordre.com/socialwork/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199975839.001.0001/acrefore-9780199975839-e-841?print=pdf>.

⁸ Carlton-Laney, "African American Social Welfare History," 1, <https://oxfordre.com/socialwork/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199975839.001.0001/acrefore-9780199975839-e-841?print=pdf>.

It was in the establishment of these clubs and organizations that African Americans could support one another in similar ways as the field of social work was doing without the formality. Carlton-Laney finds that it was not until the Progressive Era that social workers of color were able to apply to and matriculate through institutes of higher learning.⁹ Through their matriculation and completion of social work programs, many African American social workers went back to the neighborhoods of their youth and urban areas to continue to assist with the disproportionate poverty that plagued many of the communities at this time.

Though times have changed, and the field of social work is continuing to grow and flourish, there is still work that must be done. As Carlton-Laney shed light on the impact African Americans have had on the field of social work, there is still work being done today to continue to bring awareness to the Black experience, particularly in the United States.¹⁰ In the following section, mental health, particularly in the African American context, will be discussed further.

Mental Health in the African American Community

If mental health is not defined, this work runs the risk of having the meaning of mental health left to its reader's experience and interpretation. For the continuity of reading and the stability of this project, mental health is defined in accordance with the World Health Organizations' (WHO) definition. WHO defines mental health as "a state

⁹ Carlton-Laney, "African American Social Welfare History," 2, <https://oxfordre.com/socialwork/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199975839.001.0001/acrefore-9780199975839-e-841?print=pdf>.

¹⁰ Carlton-Laney, "African American Social Welfare History," 2, <https://oxfordre.com/socialwork/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199975839.001.0001/acrefore-9780199975839-e-841?print=pdf>.

of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.”¹¹ WHO further states, “An important implication of this definition is that mental health is more than just the absence of mental disorders or disabilities. Mental health is fundamental to our collective and individual ability as humans to think, emote, interact with each other, earn a living, and enjoy life.”¹² Like social work, this definition shows that mental health is a micro, mezzo, and macro system concern that has to be addressed. When it is not addressed with the individual and community, one runs the risk of negating the overall impact mental health can have on the larger community.

Throughout the research, it was discovered that training for Black social workers during the inception of social work was limited and continues to need more research. Many of the authors used in this body of works shared that mental health in the Black community must be researched, and training has to be ongoing to address the unique needs of being Black in America.

In *The Unapologetic Guide to Black Mental Health*, Dr. Rheedra Walker discusses the need for macro level systems and society as a whole to address the unmet needs and systems that have disproportionately affected the lack of adequate care for Blacks in America.¹³ Walker, like some of her colleagues who champion mental health

¹¹ World Health Organization (WHO), “Mental Health: Strengthening Our Response,” World Health Organization, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>.

¹² World Health Organization (WHO), “Mental Health,” <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>.

¹³ Rheedra Walker, *The Unapologetic Guide to Black Mental Health: Navigate an Unequal System, Learn Tools for Emotional Wellness, and Get the Help You Deserve* (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 2020), 1-14.

equality, discuss that in order for mental health services and needs to be met in America, there has to be attention given to the traumatic history of racism, classism, and the lack of cultural competency that impacts effective delivery of services to African Americans.¹⁴

Rowena Fong, Ruth McCoy, and Alan Detlaff found in their research of child welfare and education outcomes for children of color, like Walker, found that in order for children and families to receive the care their White counterparts receive barriers such as “economics, lack of awareness, stigma, cultural competency among professionals, and prior negative experiences with mental health services have to be addressed.”¹⁵ They further point out that if these barriers are not addressed, the odds of families on behalf of their children to seek care will continue to be less than those of White Americans.¹⁶

While this chapter does not focus on children, it is important to note Fong and colleagues because it reflects that mental health is vital at all ages and stages. More importantly, families who are affected by mental health issues or crises are part of faith communities. As members of those communities, families seek assistance from the systems and organizations they feel comfortable reaching out to.¹⁷ In turn, those systems, particularly the church, must be aware that one member of a family’s mental health does not happen in isolation but within the family system.

¹⁴ Walker, *The Unapologetic Guide to Black Mental Health*, 67-84.

¹⁵ Rowena Fong, Ruth G. McRoy, and Alan Detlaff, “Disproportionality and Disparities,” Oxford Research Encyclopedias, 2, <https://oxfordre.com/socialwork/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199975839.001.0001/acrefore-9780199975839-e-899?print=pdf>.

¹⁶ Fong, McRoy, and Detlaff, “Disproportionality and Disparities,” 2, <https://oxfordre.com/socialwork/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199975839.001.0001/acrefore-9780199975839-e-899?print=pdf>.

¹⁷ Fong, McRoy, and Detlaff, “Disproportionality and Disparities,” 2, <https://oxfordre.com/socialwork/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199975839.001.0001/acrefore-9780199975839-e-899?print=pdf>.

Understanding mental health affects all family members; it is crucial to understand its impact on African American adults in America. Researchers Earlise Ward, Jacqueline C. Wiltshire, Michelle A. Detry, and Dr. R. L. Brown, in their work entitled, “African American Men and Women’s Attitude toward Mental Illness, Perceptions of Stigma and Preferred Coping Behaviors” found that “an estimated 57.5 million American adults will experience a mental illness each year.”¹⁸ Within that estimated number of American adults, depression, one of the most common diagnoses in Americans, affects twelve million adult women and six million adult men.¹⁹ Ward et al. further explain that African Americans make up twelve percent or 40.1 million of the population but account for 18.7 percent or 7.5 million mental health diagnoses.²⁰ Staggering, to say the least, these numbers must be understood to see the disconnect in care. While these numbers speak to the differential in care, one must also note that the above numbers do not account for the mass number of African Americans who go without a proper mental health diagnosis or underdiagnosis.²¹

Author Victor Armstrong found that African Americans are “twenty percent more likely to experience serious mental health issues than the general population.”²² He says that while the numbers are higher for African Americans, the care they receive or seek is

¹⁸ Earlise C. Ward et al., “African American Men and Women's Attitude Toward Mental Illness, Perceptions of Stigma, and Preferred Coping Behaviors,” *Nursing Research* 62, no. 3 (2013): 187, doi:10.1097/NNR.0b013e31827bf533.

¹⁹ Ward et al., “African American Men and Women's Attitude Toward Mental Illness,” 185.

²⁰ Ward et al, “African American Men and Women's Attitude Toward Mental Illness,” 187-188.

²¹ Ward et al, “African American Men and Women's Attitude Toward Mental Illness,” 189.

²² Victor Armstrong, “The Role of the Church in Improving Mental Wellness in the African American Community,” *AFSP*, 2, <https://afsp.org/story/the-role-of-the-church-in-improving-mental-wellness-in-the-african-american-commu>.

less than the general public. Armstrong found that African Americans are more likely to seek out the care of clergy and their local faith community or church than mental health professionals. This, he points out, is important to note as a means of partnering with churches for education and normalization of the conversation of mental health and well-being.²³

Mental Health must be evaluated from different ages and coping levels.

“Although research focused on African Americans with mental illness has been increasing, few researchers have addressed gender and age differences in beliefs, attitudes, and coping.”²⁴

Black Women and Mental Health

Black women and mental health is an area that is beginning to receive more attention. Like the proceeding section on Black men and mental health, Black women have been plagued with the inability to gain adequate access to mental health care. Author Dana Givens shares her story of mental illness and the lack of support she felt growing up in Harlem, New York. In her New York Times article, Givens writes, “When I was growing up in a predominantly Black community in Harlem, therapy was stigmatized as something for people who could not handle challenges... Our culture has taught us that we do not have the privilege of being vulnerable like other communities; it

²³ Armstrong, “The Role of the Church in Improving Mental Wellness,” 2, <https://afsp.org/story/the-role-of-the-church-in-improving-mental-wellness-in-the-african-american-commu>.

²⁴ Ward et al., “African American Men and Women's Attitude Toward Mental Illness,” 187.

has taught us to find strength in our faith.”²⁵ Givens shares that in her early twenties, she found herself plagued by panic attacks and the undue stress of feeling as though she had to hide her mental diagnosis. It was not until she reached her late twenties, she began to share her story with others that she realized she was not alone in her struggle. In fact, she shared that she learned of countless other Black women in her community that had to deal with the pressure of “keeping it together.”²⁶ As she shared, and like many Black women share, faith was and continues to be a tool she uses to cope with her mental illness.

Researchers Earlise C. Ward and Susan M. Heidrich confirm what Givens shared in her account in their work entitled, “African American Women’s Beliefs about Mental Illness, Stigma, and Preferred Coping Behaviors.” Ward and Hedrich found that Black women are reluctant to receive care due to the stigma associated with mental health and illness, but they also lack the knowledge of their available care options.²⁷ Without knowledge of the care available to them, Ward and Heidrich further reveal that Black women primarily depend on their faith as a means to cope with significant illness and life stressors.²⁸ While this is not a poor coping strategy to employ, Ward and Heidrich point out that if the repertoire of coping skills is not expanded for African American women,

²⁵ Dana Givens, “The Extra Stigma of Mental Illness for African-Americans,” *New York Times*, 2, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/25/well/mind/black-mental-health.html>.

²⁶ Givens, “The Extra Stigma of Mental Illness for African-Americans,” 2, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/25/well/mind/black-mental-health.html>.

²⁷ Earlise Ward and Susan Heidrich, “African American Women's Beliefs about Mental Illness, Stigma, and Preferred Coping Behaviors,” *Research in Nursing and Health* 32, no. 5 (2009): 480-492, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2854624/>.

²⁸ Ward and Heidric, “African American Women's Beliefs about Mental Illness,” 480-492, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2854624/>.

they run the risk, like the their male counterparts receiving the care needed to live a healthy and fulfilled life.²⁹

Dr. Jasmin Abrams, Ashley Hill, and Morgan Maxwell dive into what is known as the “Black Woman Schema.” This schema as described by the researchers is “Birthed in response to the harsh realities of intersectional oppression (i.e., racism and sexism) during enslavement; the SBW Schema is an amalgamation of beliefs and cultural expectations of incessant resilience, independence, and strength that guide meaning making, cognition, and behavior related to Black womanhood.”³⁰ Further into this schema, much of the resilience portrayed by the “Super Black Woman (SBW)” simply mastering the concealment of trauma. Abrams and colleagues go on to say, “...many Black women have mastered the art of portraying strength while concealing trauma—a balancing act often held in high esteem among Black women. The SBW Schema functions as a cultural ideal and psychological coping mechanism for many Black women.”³¹

As shared by other works in this chapter, the Black woman schema, though a coping skill, must be addressed. As Abrams and colleagues pointed out, there is extensive harm in this coping that is being done underneath the surface. If not addressed, it can

²⁹ Ward and Heidrich, “African American Women's Beliefs about Mental Illness,” 480-492, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2854624/>.

³⁰ Jasmine A. Abrams, Ashley Hill, and Morgan Maxwell, “Underneath the Mask of the Strong Black Woman Schema: Disentangling Influences of Strength and Self-Silencing on Depressive Symptoms among U.S. Black Women,” *Sex Roles* 80, no. 9-10 (2019): 517, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6510490/>.

³¹ Abrams, Hill, and Maxwell, “Underneath the Mask of the Strong Black Woman Schema,” 518, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6510490/>.

affect the overall functioning and quality of life for the woman, her family, and the community.³²

Black Men and Mental Health

Men, like women, have a different lived experience. While Black women have their challenges in acquiring care, Black men are less likely to seek out care than their female counterparts.³³ Gonzales, Algeria, Pihoda, Copeland, and Zeber found in their study of African American men and Latino men, men, in general, were less likely to seek out care due to the negative interactions they have had in the past. Gonzales and associates share that men's attitudes improved toward mental health as educational attainment was gained and access to finances increased. Overall, in their study of Black men, they found that even though men will seek care, they, like women, prefer the care of their family and their faith and more likely to seek general medicinal care than the specialty of "mental health care."³⁴

Dr. William Ross, editor of *Counseling African American Males: Effective Therapeutic Interventions and Approaches*, found there has to be rules of engagement, mainly when working with men. Ross writes, "In African-centered counseling groups,

³² Abrams, Hill, and Maxwell, "Underneath the Mask of the Strong Black Woman Schema," 517-526, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6510490/>.

³³ Jodi Gonzalez et al., "How the Relationship of Attitudes Toward Mental Health Treatment and Service Use Differs by Age, Gender, Ethnicity/Race and Education," *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 46 (2009): 45-57, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/38096843_How_the_relationship_of_attitudes_toward_mental_health_treatment_and_service_use_differs_by_age_gender_ethnicityrace_and_education/citation/download.

³⁴ Gonzalez et al., "How the Relationship of Attitudes toward Mental Health Treatment," 9, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/38096843_How_the_relationship_of_attitudes_toward_mental_health_treatment_and_service_use_differs_by_age_gender_ethnicityrace_and_education/citation/download.

group counseling rules are based on the traditional African values of (a) respect, (b) responsibility, (c) reciprocity (good deeds come back to you), (d) restraint (the group before selfish needs), (e) reason (resolving disputes through the group), and (f) reconciliation (forgiveness).³⁵ Ross explains that if a Black man is seeking care and these rules are not applied during the care, the likelihood of the man returning for care is slim. There has to be recognition of the man, his culture, and the societal struggle ensued because of his race and ethnicity.

In addition to Ross, authors Delia Owens, John Queener, and Tiffany Stewart write, “It is critical that we have culturally competent therapists who can effectively understand and work with African American men. It is also important to note that the vast majority of African Americans reside in more female-headed families... Thus, therapists must consider the cultural complexities and implications of African American boys being raised by single mothers.”³⁶ Owens and colleagues point out that not only do therapists have to be culturally competent, but they have to understand the unique dynamic of a large number of men being raised in a woman-headed household. This dynamic and unique cultural characteristic can impact the treatment modality selected by the clinician the language used when speaking to the man in service and assist with addressing the concerns that might be displayed by the man during treatment.³⁷

³⁵ Delia Owens, John Queener, and Tiffany Stewart, *Counseling African American Males: Effective Therapeutic Interventions and Approaches* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, Inc., 2016), ix.

³⁶ Owens, Queener, and Stewart, *Counseling African American Males*, 2.

³⁷ Owens, Queener, and Stewart, *Counseling African American Males*, 5-8.

Barriers to Care

Several factors are described as “barriers of care.” As the name implies, these barriers hamper one’s ability to seek out the care needed to live to the best of their ability. Some of the identified care barriers are “Cultural competency, finances, access to care, culture, region, and stigmatization.”³⁸

Authors Jun Sung Hong and Wynne Sandra Korr found that minorities such as African Americans and Latinex members experience several barriers to accessing mental health services. Hong and Korr point to the dire need for cultural competency in mental health services.³⁹ Hong and Kerr found that mental health resources and services’ underutilization is due to a lack of trained professionals in mental health fields. They write cultural competency is challenging because there is a “lack of a collectively agreed-upon definition and operationalization that comprehensively and accurately captures the essence of the construct.”⁴⁰ Unfortunately, without this agreed-upon knowledge of cultural competency, there will continue to be a disconnect between the recipient and giver of services.

Hong and Korr further point out that there had to be an awareness of the client’s culture, knowing it will directly impact treatment and long-term care, utilization of

³⁸ Several of the authors in this section discuss the various barriers of care that impact Black Americans needs for mental health. Those barriers are discussed further in the entitled section.

³⁹ Jun Sung Hong and Wynne Sandra Korr, "Cultural Competency in Mental-Health Services," *Encyclopedia of Social Work*, <https://oxfordre.com/socialwork/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199975839.001.0001/acrefore-9780199975839-e-887>.

⁴⁰ Hong and Korr, "Cultural Competency in Mental-Health Services," 5, <https://oxfordre.com/socialwork/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199975839.001.0001/acrefore-9780199975839-e-887>.

services, and continuity of care.⁴¹ The authors also point that when an organization or professional lacks cultural competency, this perpetuates the vicious cycle of limiting access to care and further solidify the distrust many African Americans have toward medical professionals.⁴²

Dr. Lisa Firestone agrees with Hong and Korr discussing that part of cultural competency, mainly when working with African American clients in mental health, has to consider the traumatic history of racism and the long term implications it has had from its construct in America.⁴³ In concert with Firestone, Dr. William Ross found that as professionals are seeking to be culturally competent, there has to be a willingness to use non-traditional approaches that are better suited for men and women of African American descent. Dr. Ross points out this can be done, but it must be done through the lens of the Black experience, and that not of the Eurocentric lenses often used in developing theories, treatment approaches, and care. Without addressing the needs of Black people in practice, then one is left with continuing the norm of what appears to be non-compliance in treatment instead of a needed change in treatment modalities.⁴⁴

In addition to Firestone and Ross, Dr. Kyaieen Connor found that historical trauma has generational implications. She writes, “Black Americans are a resilient people, but

⁴¹ Hong and Korr, "Cultural Competency in Mental-Health Services," 5-8, <https://oxfordre.com/socialwork/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199975839.001.0001/acrefore-9780199975839-e-887>.

⁴² Hong and Korr, "Cultural Competency in Mental-Health Services," 5-8, <https://oxfordre.com/socialwork/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199975839.001.0001/acrefore-9780199975839-e-887>.

⁴³ Lisa Firestone, “The Trauma of Racism,” *Psychology Today*, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/compassion-matters/202006/the-trauma-racism>.

⁴⁴ Owens, Queener, and Stewart, *Counseling African American Males*, 6.

these historical traumas have lasting consequences for individuals, families, and communities.”⁴⁵ These lasting implications impact future generations’ ability to seek care and dispel the culture and stigma associated with cultural and societal mental health and illness. Connor further elaborates on the trauma and explains that in order to address this fully, there has to be an awareness by the non-minority culture of what happened, and education to use a framework that is suitable for the success of therapy and treatment.

Natalie Turner found that another barrier can be related to the region in which someone resides. Turner found that Blacks living in the South or what is commonly known as the ‘Bible Belt’ are less likely to seek treatment for mental health issues or concerns.⁴⁶ This lack of treatment-seeking behavior is based on the belief that God will take care of everything. As Turner continued to evaluate the body of knowledge, she also found that culture and perceived stigma impacted one’s ability or desire to receive care. This belief that mental health must be handled privately and out of others’ sight leads to further stigmatization of mental health in the Black community. For this stigma to be addressed, Turner suggests that there must be a discussion at churches and the spirituality of Black people as they seek to handle what troubles them.⁴⁷

Though this project seeks to show the impact faith can have on mental health, faith can sometimes be a barrier to long term care. Akihiko Masuda, P.L. Anderson, and

⁴⁵ Kyaïen O. Conner, “Why Historical Trauma Is Critical to Understanding Black Mental Health,” *Psychology Today*, 1, [https:// www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/achieving-health-equity/202010/why-historical-trauma-is-critical-understanding-black-mental](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/achieving-health-equity/202010/why-historical-trauma-is-critical-understanding-black-mental).

⁴⁶ Natalie Turner, “Mental Health Care Treatment Seeking among African Americans and Caribbean Blacks: What is the Role of Religiosity/Spirituality?” *Scholars Archive*, https://scholarsarchive.library.albany.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1006&context=honorscolleg e_sw.

⁴⁷ Turner, “Mental Health Care Treatment,” https://scholarsarchive.library.albany.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1006&context=honorscolleg e_sw.

J. Edmonds found, “While African Americans are found to prefer to receive guidance for mental health concerns from non-psychological professionals, such as clergy and family members, evidence suggests that professional psychological services also can be beneficial for this group.”⁴⁸ They further explain that seeking care from non-professional psychological professionals is not a bad habit. However, if this self-help behavior is not coupled with a mental health professional’s work and expertise, their needs may continue to go unmet.⁴⁹ These unmet needs will continue to appear as the needs of African Americans are not being met.

To add to the conversation about the impact faith has on one seeking assistance with mental illness and well-being, scholars Gonzales, Algeria, Phihoda, Copeland, and Zeber write:

...one study found no differences for a general receptivity to mental health services” between non-Latino Whites and non-Whites; however, when asked specifically about seeking out clergy for mental health problems, non-Whites were more likely to believe in the efficacy of the clergy....{this was due to the African Americans and Latinos} mistrust of health care professionals or concerns about provider competence with their ethnic/racial group may decrease their comfort talking to professionals.⁵⁰

Like other scholars and professionals mentioned in this chapter, Gonzales and associates emphasize the importance of clergy to African Americans and Latinos but bring to the forefront that this trust is due to the mistrust of the helping professionals. Until this

⁴⁸ Akihiko Masuda, P. L. Anderson, and J. Edmonds, "Help-Seeking Attitudes, Mental Health Stigma, and Self-Concealment among African American College Students," *Psychology Faculty Publications* 91 (2012): 3, https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/psych_facpub/91.

⁴⁹ Masuda, Anderson, and Edmonds, "Help-Seeking Attitudes," 3, https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/psych_facpub/91.

⁵⁰ Gonzalez et al., “How the Relationship of Attitudes toward Mental Health Treatment,” 47, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/38096843_How_the_relationship_of_attitudes_toward_mental_health_treatment_and_service_use_differs_by_age_gender_ethnicityrace_and_education/citation/download.

mistrust is addressed both in the church and in the community, clergy run the risk of tasking themselves with a job they are not equipped or prepared to handle.

Intersection of Pulpit and Pew

After further study, practitioners of the church and heralds of the Gospel must preach and teach on the importance of mental health. As pointed out in the above sections, particularly in the Black community, many will seek their faith leader's guidance before making an appointment with a trained professional. Being aware of this propensity to reach out to clergy before the counselor, church leaders must be prepared to take action. With an estimated 57.5 million American adults being diagnosed with a mental illness each year, one cannot help but think that one of those million Americans is sitting in the pews and preaching from the pulpit.⁵¹ From the inception of this project, the goal was to show how the pulpit and pew intersect with one another as a means for parishioners and practitioners to participate in transparent discipleship. This intersection indicates that while the parishioner and the pew roles differ in positions, the two have more in common than not.

From the previous chapter of the woman with the issue of blood who boldly told Jesus why she touched Him to the foremothers of the Gospel and the Women's Suffrage Movement in the historical chapter, each of the women highlighted all shared their challenges with what can be perceived and acknowledged as a mental health issue or

⁵¹ Ward et al., "African American Men and Women's Attitude toward Mental Illness," 187.

illness at one time or another in their life towards their journeys in pursuit of equality for all humankind.⁵²

While this chapter focuses on African Americans and mental health due to the project's location, regardless of the ethnic or racial composition of one's context, the pulpit and pew must be approached from a holistic stance. It is dangerous to think of their participants as the smiling faces and suits on Sunday mornings without regard to their mental health and well-being. Taking the time to acknowledge this will ensure that both the pulpit and the pew can articulate their needs to one another in such a way as they participate in transparent discipleship. This participation in transparent discipleship, or telling of one's encounter with Jesus, further shows that each one is aware of the communal needs of one another. Dr. Walker shares in her book that people of African descent are oriented to a communal sensibility. It is innate from the involuntary nature of being brought to America through enslavement to the various establishments or various organizations that have worked to meet the needs of the Black community, particularly that of the Black church. The Black church must know its importance and understand its role in the lives of its people.⁵³

Implications for Ministry

Ministry should be viewed from a three-dimensional or holistic vantage point. If one is not careful, the minister and the congregation alike will limit their understanding

⁵² In Luke chapter eight, the text does not explicitly state that the woman had a mental health issue, but it could be assumed that due to the cultural isolation sustained due to her medical issues, the woman dealt with undiagnosed depression and other mental health issues that are known to affect women, particularly women of color.

⁵³ Walker, "The Unapologetic Guide to Black Mental Health," 120-123.

of one's well-being to only what they see or experience on their days of worship. As evident in the research used in this work, it is necessary for pastors, ministers, staff, lay leaders, and members alike to be aware of mental health and the needs of those they serve. In addition to being aware of the needs of those they serve, it is equally essential to reflect on their own needs and know when to seek out assistance when having difficulties.

As found in the research, there is a need for ongoing studies for the African American context, and the impact spirituality and religiosity have on the Black experience. While one may not be a social worker, ministry leaders need to have a working knowledge of mental health and its impact on themselves and the ones they serve. Through the research, there is an ongoing need to provide more insight into the lives of African Americans and the impact church can have on its people.

After reading this chapter, ministry leaders are encouraged to glean from the knowledge of other fields who seek to bring clarity to the lives of those they serve. Though ministry leaders' overall objective is focused on the people's spirit and religion, one cannot do ministry in a silo. This silo mentality can impact ministry and impact the worldview of the pulpit and the pew alike. As stated in the previous section, ministry leaders must be willing to address the gaps in service in their communities and be willing to address them and seek out community partnerships with other organizations to complement the church's ministries.

As Carlton-Laney pointed out in her research, if it was not for forming women's clubs, mutual benefits clubs, civic groups, and organizations, the African American

community's needs would remain unmet.⁵⁴ This formation of the various groups shows that when society failed to provide within the Black community, the people picked up where society left a void in provision. Today, the church can do the same by providing for the needs of those in their congregations and communities alike. Though every church is different, the ability to recognize needs and foster partnerships is something that can be done regardless of resources or expertise. The ability to look beyond oneself is necessary for ministry to continue in an ever-changing world.

As the world is changing, ministry leaders and ministries need to draw on the expertise of researchers, national, and local organizations, and members who remain active in their respective fields, particularly in mental health, to learn the basics of best practice and how to remain relevant as the world around the church changes. As highlighted by many scholars in this work, the church is often the first and last place African Americans seek assistance to cope with mental health. Knowing this is imperative, and the church's responsibility is to use their influence to engage and connect parishioners alike with the care they need to live their best lives.

This care and connection beyond the church to licensed professionals and organizations will have an impact on the life of the one seeking assistance and the community in which they reside. This assistance will further contribute to the stability and overall health of the greater community alike.

⁵⁴ Carlton-Laney, "African American Social Welfare History," <https://oxfordre.com/socialwork/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199975839.001.0001/acrefore-9780199975839-e-841?print=pdf>.

Conclusion

While the church and community alike work to engage in the mental health conversation, there is much work left to be done. Givens writes at the conclusion of self-disclosed mental health article, “The only way to truly end the stigma around mental illness is through empathy and offering comfort to those around you who may need help. It is important that we don’t merely start the conversation but continue it by taking action, which is seeking out treatment.”⁵⁵ As Givens has shared, there is much work that needs to be done in order to end the stigma of mental illness, increase the discussion of mental health, and provide people the safe spaces to discuss their struggles with one another openly. To be a practitioner in the Black church, one must provide the best care for those under their care and leadership. When one knows better, they can do better, and in doing better, there is the implication for them to use their voice to share in making the individual and community a better place.

As African Americans’ plight in America is always changing, the Black church must pick up the cross of mental health and bear the responsibility of educating its members, facilitating change, and fighting the stigma that continues to plague the communities. Suppose the church is able to do this. In that case, the church is assisting in “the promotion, protection, and restoration of mental health which can be regarded as a vital concern of individuals, communities, and societies throughout the world.”⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Givens, “The Extra Stigma of Mental Illness for African-Americans,” 2, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/25/well/mind/black-mental-health.html>.

⁵⁶ World Health Organization (WHO), “Mental Health,” <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

Transparent discipleship is a model of ministry that encourages personal reflection on one's encounter with Jesus Christ coupled with a willingness to be transparent or honest with those in whom they share their story or testimony in the church vocabulary. Even though this sounds easy, it was in the reflection of my story and the pastoring of a body of believers; I observed there to be a hesitation for public transparent testimony. This observation was made during the time of testimony Thursdays, in which members would be encouraged to stand and share their stories before the Bible study attendees. When my husband or I would ask for testimonies, many of the same people who told us their stories privately did not engage in public testimony but instead remained quiet. This behavior of what I perceived as hesitation, both personal and public, led to the formation of this project. This project that addressed personal concerns and reservations such as low self-esteem, lack of self-worth, cultural and societal norms and mores, and other personal reasons was anticipated and perceived as impacting the ability or decision to share their story or testimony publicly.

In the decision to embark on a doctoral journey, this project was birthed during a time in my life when I was beginning on a new journey called ministry and motherhood. Within a matter of months, I bore my first child and was a midwife for the birth of a new

church in San Antonio. While this was an exciting time for me, unbeknownst to me, I would be confronted with a mental health issue that is all too familiar to pregnant and postpartum women: postpartum depression. Little did I know, in what was a private struggle with postpartum depression, God would use to prepare me for public ministry. Public ministry and several platforms in which mental health in Black and brown communities could be discussed at length.

Furthermore, this public ministry would lead me to share my testimony during my ordination. Thus, while the suffering was in private, it was in the pursuing of Jesus Christ that I could share publicly with others how an encounter with Jesus changed my life. In other words, I was able to model transparent discipleship; or simply, I was able to tell my story.

While I am not the first to have a private encounter with Jesus, in my role as pastor and mental health clinician, I have seen the benefits of being transparent as I introduce some and lead others to Christ. In the final chapter of this body of work, one will read the methodology for a model of transparent discipleship, the implementation of the project, a summary of learning, limitations, additional findings, and a conclusion.

Methodology

To develop a model for transparent discipleship, several factors had to be taken into consideration. First, the question was raised on how one goes about equipping participants with the tools needed for long-term engagement in the local church and their respective communities. This equipping would then lead to outcomes that when one can learn the tools of transparent discipleship, they will feel more comfortable telling their

story to others. To best equip the participants for this project, address their thoughts and encourage long-term actions as a model for transparent discipleship, the project was designed as a narrative qualitative research project. This design provided the participants with the opportunity to decide their level of engagement, disclosure of their story/testimony in a manner that was most comfortable to them, provide time for reflection both in and out of session, and finally end with practical tools that would equip and educate participants on recognition and the telling of their story.

As a reader of the document the words “story” and “testimony” will be used interchangeably for the participants and readers. This decision was made to address the notion that one’s life is lived in the sacred and secular, without the sharp demarcation that is often associated with Christian living in the world. The noted exchange in vocabulary is utilized for participants to understand the value of their story both in the church and outside of the church and understand life and ministry.

In addition to learning the tools for transparent discipleship, storytelling, or the ability to share one’s testimony is essential to sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ. Thus, when one can share their story or testimony with others, they are providing an invitation for others to see the hand of Christ in their life. Therefore, when one can articulate their story or testimony in or outside the church, there is a cathartic and healing property that impacts the storyteller and the hearer. This healing is evident by the tellers and hearers' decision to continue to engage their current church or seek the assembly of a local church body to continue to learn how their story is impacted and molded by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is estimated that when one can identify, articulate, and share their story in private, there will be a natural inclination to share their story with others outside of the church or identified faith community publicly, thus leading to further engagement of Christ. This leading to Christ is anticipated to work in tandem with the desire to invite others to participate in their church or faith community.

Implementation

The project was completed in a virtual environment to keep the participants and me safe due to the worldwide pandemic caused by COVID-19. Therefore, all meetings, paperwork, and communication were completed via web-based tools and services such as Zoom for weekly sessions, Gmail for delivery of weekly communication, DocuSign for the acquisition of signatures for all necessary documentation, Microsoft Office suite for the design and presentation of weekly session PowerPoint presentations, and Google Doc forms for delivery and receipt of project pre- and post-assessments, demographics surveys, weekly focused journaling, and project evaluation.

Before the official implementation of the project, an interest meeting was held two weeks after the approved project flyer was presented to the church. A copy of the flyer can be found in the last section of this chapter for reference. During the interest meeting, a brief overview of the project's intent was discussed, along with the session content and the expectations for participants. A question-and-answer time was provided at the end of the session. This time allowed participants to understand the project, their time commitment, and what they could anticipate during the six-week implementation time frame. Though church members and leadership were aware of the upcoming project,

my husband and I frequently spoke about the need for maximum participation from members as their schedules allowed.

After the interest meeting, participants were given two weeks to express interest in the project and complete all necessary documents for continued participation in the project. The documents, including the consent form and group expectations, and covenant agreement, were delivered by DocuSign for official signature. Though the forenamed documents required a signature, I read all documents aloud to the participants to provide clarity and answer any questions that the interested participants may ask before the first session. During each session, participants were reminded of their voluntary consent and their ability to withdraw from the sessions at any given time.

After completing all required signed documentation, the participants were then provided with a participant number assigned by me and then sent to the participants in a private email. This number was used on all journals and requested information. This method was put in place to protect the identity of the participants. Following the receipt of their participant number, the participant was then provided access to their journals kept on Google Docs. Each person received a link that was created specifically for them to edit and complete during the project. Though the focus journaling was not required, it was highly encouraged for the success of the project. All information provided to the participants was confidential and only known between me and the participant. The only mass sharing of information was done when sending out reminder emails to the participants, sending the secured Zoom link, and thanking the participants for their participation in the project. This was most appropriate as the participants were aware of each other's involvement in the project and provided accountability for their consistent

participation. To establish a group rhythm and rapport, the session descriptions can be found in the appendices.

Each session began with a welcome or check-in. This time was often accomplished by a check-in or centering moment. These first five to ten minutes of the session allowed participants to reflect on the question or prompt provided and to be present. This time of self-reflection was connected to the overall lesson or current events happening. This check-in provided a model as participants learned transparent testimony.

Each participant was asked to complete a pre- and post-assessment on storytelling and a demographic survey during the first and last sessions. Both assessments were provided electronically via email and email links and given to the participants on the day of the scheduled sessions. Had there been a need to provide a hard copy, the assessments could have been printed and submitted to me as needed. The results of these assessments will be discussed in the following section at length as a part of the summary of learning.

Each session, following the welcome and check-in, the group discussed the group expectations and covenant agreement. Typically, termed group rules, it was decided that expectations and understanding would be more appropriate for establishing group norms and allowing for the unhampered ability of each person's choice to participate in the group or their discontinued participation in the group.

A closing affirmation was recited by the group to reinforce the lessons and tools taught for the day. This affirmation was designed to reinforce the lessons and overall desire to see them participate in long-term, transparent discipleship. This affirmation was also intended to build self-esteem and self-worth. In addition to the closing litany, I would pray for the group and ask for prayer requests as another means of having

participants be transparent. This opportunity to share a prayer request would allow for an intimate exchange of information and engagement, whether for self or others.

Finally, as noted in the session description, participants were asked to participate in focused journaling each week. This journaling was designed to be completed after attending the designated session, emphasizing the lesson and not on personal feelings and thoughts. While the personal statements and comments were shared in the recorded sessions, the journal questions were done to assess retention and record thoughts regarding the materials discussed in the session. At the conclusion of the project, as was with the beginning, a post-assessment and project evaluation were provided to all participants to complete for feedback and testing the hypothesis.

Summary of Learning

In the following section is the project's outcomes after the successful implementation of the six-week project design. The findings will be presented in a graphical and editorial format as some data was captured without generating a formal graph. A total of eleven participants signed up for the project, but on average, only nine consistently provided feedback and completed the focused journaling.

Demographics

A demographic survey was sent to participants to obtain basic data to capture the prominent characteristics of the group. I found after evaluating the data, some questions were not included but were captured visually. For example, I neglected to ask the participants their gender. Though I am unable to submit a pictorial representation of the

overall gender composition of the group, visually, I witnessed several participants were female, which coincides with the general demographics of the church congregation. For this study, ninety percent of the participants were female, and the remaining ten percent were male. The average age of participants was forty point six years of age. The youngest participant age recorded was twenty-two years, and the oldest recorded age was fifty-seven years, both self-disclosed but unable to be captured in graphical form. Additionally, one hundred percent of the group members identified as Non-Hispanic, Black, or African American.

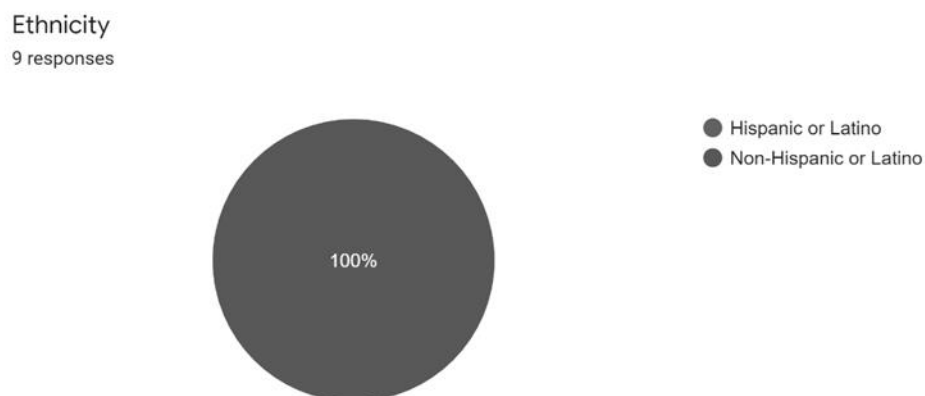


Figure 1. Ethnicity

This was in line with the overall composition of the church. Most of the church members identify as the smaller group, African American, Non-Hispanic. Though African American, Non-Hispanic is the majority, there are members in the congregation that identify with other ethnic and racial groups. This information is appropriate to share as many of the resources and authors cited for this work were of African American descent. In addition to the composition of the group, I wanted to highlight the need for African American congregations to evaluate their processes when it comes to discussing

storytelling as much of the research showing the hallmark of storytelling is discussed from the Black church experience.

Below you will find further discussion on the educational background and marital status of the sample size of the participants.

Education (highest level of Education attained)

9 responses

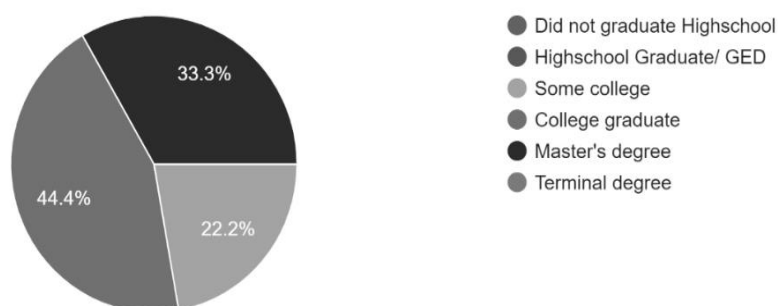


Figure 2. Education (highest level of education attained)

In figure one participants were asked their highest level of education attained or completed. According to the graphic, 22.2% report some college, 44.4% of the group reported college graduate, and 33.3% reported a master's degree. Overall, this demographic reflects the larger congregation, with more than fifty percent of members having completed some college.

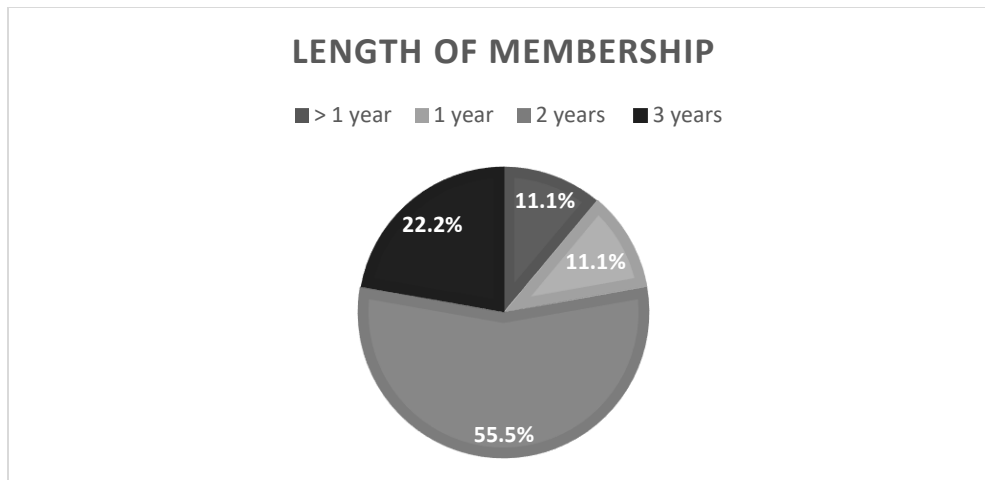


Figure 3. Length of membership

Figure two illustrates the length of membership of the participants. When looking closely, 11.1 percent reported being a member for one year; 11.1 percent reported less than one year or zero years; 55.5 percent reported two-year membership, with 22.2 percent reporting being members for three years. This overall average came out to 1.8 years of membership at the church. The results established that most of the participants have been a part of the church during its early formation as a church plant in 2018. The members who stated they have been members for three years confirmed they were either part of the launch team or founding members who joined the church immediately following its inception.

Pre/ Post Storytelling Assessment

After participants were asked to provide basic information on themselves, each person was asked to complete a pre (during the first session) and post (during the sixth session) storytelling assessment. This assessment was used to record the participants' thoughts on the idea of storytelling, their definitions of the words, “story” and “testimony,” disclosure of what they feel belongs in a testimony, and then to assess their

level of comfort in sharing their story with others. Like all of the documents for this project, the assessment was sent to the participants through a Google Doc survey that provided access to the evaluation without confidentiality broken. Below are a sample of some of the questions and answers received by the participants. A complete list of questions can be found in the final section of this document:

Question One: What is your (unassisted)¹ definition of the word testimony?

“A testimony is a personal statement of deliverance from a tribulation with the help of God.”

“I define testimony as telling my narrative of a time God has assisted me in a time of need; rather good or bad. Sharing my experience with someone else to provide encouragement or praise of the goodness and faithfulness of God. Also, could be sharing lessons learned to better educate another.”

As you look at the responses from question one of the pre-post storytelling assessments, one should note that the common words to the response of one’s definition include language that reflects possession and personal reflection, such as “personal statement... telling my narrative... delivered you out of a situation.” This is important to notate as a testimony is often witnessed and accomplished by the testifying of others. This is imperative as I reflect on the importance of one engaging in transparent discipleship. There is an element of ownership that accounts for the transparency of its delivery.

In addition to the personal element of the definitions, each of the descriptions also include God as the ultimate factor of healing and deliverance. This common factor

¹ Unassisted refers to the person's definition without the use of a textbook or smart device to look up the definition.

reflects the need for God to be present in one's testimony which is in line with one of the tools of transparent discipleship, which is recognizing God and or Jesus in one's story or testimony.

Question Two: What is your (unassisted)² definition of the word story?

"A story is a telling of a series of events or situations that led to something specific."

"My story is how I perceive something, whether it's my life or something that I have personally witnessed."

Question two, as seen above, ask for the participants to provide an unassisted definition of the word story. The data suggest that the word story is a series of events that are told by the witness or the hearer of the story. Similar to testimony, some of the participants included a personal element to include their family and their values. While the goal was to use the two words, story, and testimony, interchangeably, this data suggests that the words, if not defined correctly, can be defined by the participant according to their own definitions. To further examine this point, refer to the outcome of the question, "Is there a difference between story and a testimony?"

² Unassisted refers to the person's definition without the use of a textbook or smart device to look up the definition.

Is there a difference between a story and a testimony?
responses

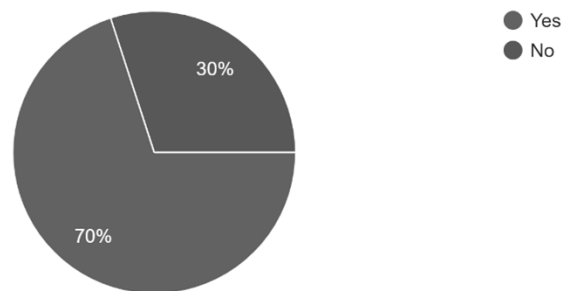


Figure 4. Difference between “story” and “testimony”

As shown in the graph, an overwhelming majority of the participants reported a difference between the words “story” and “testimony.” Seventy percent of the participants reported the difference even when discussing the two words in the sessions. Even though I wanted to use the two words as synonymous restatements of one another, it would have been beneficial to use the word testimony for the church context and then suggest the word story when speaking to others outside of the church context. This change in the vocabulary will lend itself to being welcoming and allow for the participant to share who they are in relationship to Christ, but also have the language to reflect the context in which they are speaking in. Finally, when asked what belongs in a testimony, the participants responded in the following ways:

Question Seven: What belongs in your testimony?

“Trials and tribulations you have faced.”

“Your truth, humility, vulnerability. The heroes and villains in your life.

Tales.”

“God.”

The responses, as mentioned above, show several elements when thinking of one’s testimony. The participants used words such as trials and tribulations, which

reflects the spiritual aspect of a testimony. In addition to trials and tribulations being listed, another word that was used as reflected in the data above was “truth.” While all responses are not listed above, the word “truth” was a word that was used often both in the assessment and during the sessions. Participants could be heard sharing the need, to be honest and “speak their truth” when reflecting on their life and the impact God has had on them. While the participants discussed what belonged in a testimony, this question proved to be unclear to a few participants in which they reported the following:

I’m not too sure what this question means, but if it is asking what is my testimony, I would say I have overcome self-doubt and self-hatred. I have overcome the fear of not being accepted because of my sexuality. And I’m currently doing better with handling my depression and overcoming the urge of handling and not entertaining my suicidal ideation.

“I don't think a testimony is a singular event. I have many testimonies that span my evolution into motherhood, my career, relationships, etc.”

In the future, I recommend taking more time to walk through the assessment to ensure all of the information being asked is clear, and participants are able to ask questions as they need. Even though time was built into the sessions for questions and answers, when implementing the project, there is never enough time for all questions to be answered.

Focus Journaling

Each week the participants were asked to answer a series of questions that they recorded in an online journal. The journaling prompts or questions were a direct reflection of the sessions completed. The average journaling assignment was one question, except for the first session that asked participants to read, reflect, and answer

five questions. A sample of the journaling prompts, and questions can be found in the appendices. During week one, "Who Am I?: The Art of Transparent Testimony."

Participants were asked to read and answer questions regarding the biblical text of Luke 8:40-48. The questions were as follows:

1. Who is the main character in the story?
2. How long was the woman suffering from her issue? (hemorrhages or bleeding)
3. Why do you think the hemorrhaging woman's story is often called the "the miracle interrupting the miracle?"
4. Do you see yourself in the story above? Why or why not?
5. How did Jesus affirm the woman in the story? How does Jesus affirm you in your life?

With each of the questions being directly related to the reading of the text, (i.e., the answer for question one: Who is the main character in the story? The woman or the hemorrhaging woman? The question that relates to the overall hypothesis of transparent discipleship is related to the participant's responses to question four which stated: "Do you see yourself in the story above? Why or why not?" Here are some of the participant's responses:

"Yes. I was born with a disease called Sickle Cell. I used to have issues with it as a child, but once I got older, I rarely experience any issues with it. It's like my body has been healed."

"I do see myself in the story above. I say this because with some struggles in my own life, when I understood that I could just go to God with them, they were made better. My life has not been the easiest, but I know that with God on my side, I can be at peace with whatever is going on."

“Yes, because we faithfully seek Jesus to fix our “issues” as well.”

After further examination of the data, all of the participants were able to see themselves in the woman’s story regardless of their gender. This is important to notate as the group was compromised of ninety percent women and ten percent men. This affirmation of seeing themselves in the text, regardless of gender, shows that the content of the story was more applicable than the woman’s gender. While I did my best to highlight the woman’s concern as she was hemorrhaging for twelve years, the more powerful lesson to take away from her was her encounter with Jesus that left her healed and with an improved quality of life. In the future, I would include two biblical examples of healing to include a man’s story in the event this group had more men than women.

During session two, we covered: "What Makes a Good Story?: Learning the Elements of a Story and Storytelling." During this session, participants were introduced to the story linking model by Dr. Anne Wimberly. In this model, I discussed the following:

- Engaging the Everyday Story
- Engaging the Christian Faith in the Bible
- Engaging the Christian Faith Story from African American Heritage
- Engaging in Christian Ethical Decision Making

It was in each of the sections that I further explained how their everyday story was impacted by their faith, their heritage, and their decision-making. All of these elements, after discussion, were then added to their focused journaling for the week that asked the following prompt: after learning about the story linking by Dr. Anne Wimberly, identify and write about your everyday story. Here are some of the responses of the participants:

My everyday story would be me fighting the internal voices of self-doubt and low self-esteem. I have to remind myself daily who I am, who I belong to, and all of the things I've overcome. Everyday there's a small voice saying to me, "you're making the wrong decision" or "you're not good enough." I am truly my worst critic. I have to understand that it's ok. I'm going to make mistakes and I'm not perfect. When I talk to God and read His word I'm reminded of what I'm made of and God's promises for my life.

I think that connecting your life story to your faith is important. My faith has shaped a lot of my life and I am thankful that my mother instilled a strong faith in God in me from an early age. Without faith, I'm not sure where I would be right now. Losing both of my parents at a young age has truly tested my faith. And I have to admit that I was very angry with God for a while. But I have a story, a testimony, that has come out of dealing with that loss that I feel could help people dealing with the same loss. Losing your parents young is something that I would not wish on anyone but if I can help someone deal with it based on my story, I am more than willing to share.

The participants responses speak to their faith in God and how their overall stories impact their daily living. While not all responses are recorded here, this question was discussed during the session, and the overall discussion further validated the need to separate the words "story" and "testimony." Many of the participants shared they felt their life story was impacted by their testimony. There was an overall sense of one's story being long-term, always evolving, and one's testimony, short in nature and varied according to what was and what is going on in one's life.

During session three: "You Can't Tell It All: The Importance of Knowing and How to Appropriately Articulate One's Testimony (Story) in the Presence of Others." Participants were asked to read and discuss the article by Communiquepr entitled, "The Art of Story Telling in Public Relations."³ This article covered five narrative elements to storytelling including: exposition, conflict, characters, climax, and denouement/resolution.

³ Communique PR Staff, "The Art of Story Telling in Public Relations," Communique PR, <https://www.communiquepr.com/the-art-of-storytelling-in-public-relations-5-narrative-elements/8901/>.

It was in covering these five elements in storytelling that the participants were asked to further reflect on the identified elements of a story and ways to implement them in telling one's testimony. Below are a few responses of the participants:

It's hard to pinpoint what would make my everyday story. I know my story is not appropriate in every setting and I usually feed on others to know what is appropriate to talk about. Many of the things in life I have experienced that I feel are story worthy were things that were totally preventable, and I could have avoided it altogether. After understanding and realizing that everything happens for a reason, I stopped blaming myself and started looking for the good in it and or how the event that happened just changed the narrative on how the story continued.

When telling one's testimony the different elements of a story are implemented in order to give a series of events and how you made your way to a resolution. I don't think a resolution is necessarily permanent because other things may come up or the story may simply continue. I also believe that when telling your story it's important not to become caught up on trying to identify and include all the elements because then the story may sound forced or not authentic. You don't want your story to sound rehearsed or forced, so in order to remain genuine I think it's good to have structure, but not necessarily obsess over the setup or including every element strategically. When storytelling I think the story automatically lines up how it should anyway. Also, it's important to keep in mind who your audience is. Everyone doesn't necessarily have to know your story and some things might not need to be shared with every crowd!

The responses as shared showed responses to learning the varied parts of storytelling.

While the information was pertinent to expanding the participants' knowledge of story element identification, I would consider in the future adding another Christian perspective as it relates to storytelling and testimony sharing. The article, though insightful, was written by a public relations firm and did not provide an opportunity for translating the elements into the church vernacular, such as testimony.

In session four: "You Got a Story to Tell: Learning to Find One's Voice in the Midst of Life's Challenges" the participants were asked to complete the Beck Depression Inventory on their own, followed by a brief discussion of how they felt about their own

mental health and the impact of mental health on the African American communities. Let it be known that I did not ask the participants to share the results of the self-administered inventory, but to share how evaluating their mental health impacted them. It was shared at the beginning and the conclusion of the session if someone scored high on the inventory according to the score sheet, they could remain in the Zoom room to discuss the results with me, followed by recommendations for further care. As a licensed mental health professional, I wanted to ensure the participants were able to identify their needs and then be provided the resources to fulfill their needs outside of the session. After a brief discussion on mental health in Black and brown communities, participants were asked the following journal prompt: Do you believe there is a stigma to mental health in the African American community? How do you feel about mental health? If you felt you were in crisis, would you know how to connect with mental health professionals in the community? Here are some of the responses of the participants:

I do feel there's a stigma around mental health in the Black community. I've heard several friends and family reference prayer and God as their source for support in times of a mental health battle. I personally embrace therapy and believe God created resources to assist us in managing good mental health. I have used a counselor in the past and endorse recalibrating with one whenever needed.

Yes, I believe there is a stigma about mental health in the African American community. Part of the problem lies with a perceived weakness that comes from admitting to and asking for help with MH concerns...and another problem stems from Christians' faith that God (alone) can and will always fix it. Bottom line is [that] mental health is a real problem...and individuals shouldn't be afraid to seek professional help. I have in the past (and would seek help) if I needed to.

Yes, I believe there is a stigma about mental health in the Black community. I used to be weary of mental health issues in the Black community and now I am an advocate for getting professional help. I believe it is imperative to have someone who can help you sort through the voices, feelings, relationships, etc. as you are navigating those things. I know how to get help if I am in a crisis.

Overall, there was a resounding “yes” delivered by the group in response to the journal prompt. The responses of the participants as shared above reflects the overall nature of mental health at the church. Members and leadership are not bashful when speaking of the need for mental health care for all people. I will say that this session appeared to be of the most interest as many of the participants shared their own mental health journeys with the group. This moment, as a group, as it relates to transparent discipleship was a reminder that being vulnerable amongst one’s peers and fellow congregation members can establish a rapport and trust with others that may have not been present or was surface level. As the project administrator, I believe this session could have been a two- or three-part series.

In the fifth session was entitled “I Need to Hear from You: The Impact of One's Story on Others in Their Community.” The participants were introduced to the historical figures as discussed in previous chapter. Historical events and figures such as the Women’s Suffrage Movement, Rev. Jarena Lee, Rev. Julia A. J. Foote, and Evangelist Zilpha Elaw were introduced at length. This introduction of such historical figures was later connected to present day influential women in the world to show how both the historical and present-day women have lives that have impacted the world.

Following the session, participants were asked to journal on the following: Write about a person in your life, historical, or famous whose life story has impacted you?

Here are some of the participant's responses:

“If I have to pick one person that has had an impact on me is my mother. She is a strong Black woman who believes in the power of prayer and has seen her share of trials...”

“My dad’s life story impacts me to this day...”

“My mother’s life story has truly shaped who I am today....”

As read above, many of the participants spoke to the impact their parents or someone within their immediate spheres of influence has impacted their lives today and for years to come. During the session, when asked about someone they knew that impacted them, there was a robust conversation on parents and guardians.

The last session, session six was "It Is a Wrap: Finding Your Voice to Go and Tell It on the Mountain." This session did not have any focused journaling, but was used to recap the previous weeks, answer any questions, talk freely as a group, and used as time for me to affirm the group again and to thank the participants for their committee and dedication to the project. This session was final session was used as a time to recap what was discussed in the weeks prior to answer any questions before the project ended. This was a great session as it allowed time for group members to affirm one another, speak about what they learned and to reflect on the overall experience which was captured in the following section.

Project Evaluation

At the conclusion of the project, all participants were asked to complete a thirteen-question evaluation regarding their experience with the project. One hundred percent of the participants completed the evaluation. The following data was collected because of this questionnaire. The entire evaluation can be found in the appendices.

Question One: 1. Have you gained better insight on how to articulate your story (testimony) since your participation in this project?

Yes, I feel like I can find a way to better articulate my story. Just because I don't see the significance on the surface doesn't mean that it won't have a significant effect on others. I think I would be able to better gauge if a person is mature or invested enough in me to hear my story. The most important thing I have learned is to be unapologetic about my story/testimony.

“No, it is the same as before.”

“Yes, I have. I struggle with telling my own story but going through this has shown me how to organize my story, so that way it's easy to follow and it can actually have an impactful testimony to share.”

Question two “Has your perception of the importance of storytelling in and outside of church changed since participating in this project?” Seventy-five percent of the participants responded by stating their perception did not change. Below are a couple of the responses received:

No, it has not. I knew years ago the importance of storytelling in and outside church because the people that really need to hear my story don't show up to church. They're the folks I work with, the strangers I meet when I am doing my everyday activities, and they're my friends and family.

One participant shared that their perception did change as they understood the importance of telling their story and the impact it has on the growth of the church. Below is the respondent's answer:

“Yes. I knew it was important, but this research has helped me see how pertinent it is for growth in and outside the church.”

When asked how effective the weekly session were the participants responded in the following manner:

Were the weekly presentations EFFECTIVE? 4

10 responses

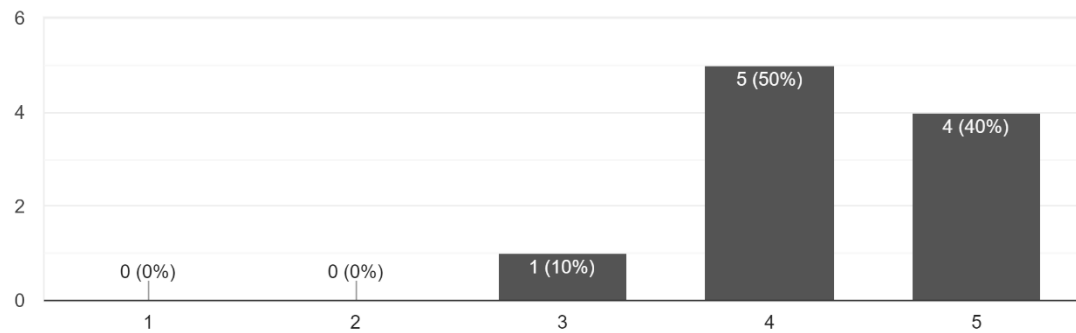


Figure 5. Effectiveness of the weekly presentations

Figure four reflects the overall effectiveness of the weekly session. Based on a scale of one through four, with the following scale:

- 1- Poor
- 2- Average
- 3- Good
- 4- Exceptional
- 5- N/A

Fifty percent of the participants reported the sessions were effective with another forty percent reporting N/A. This data is noted and reflects the need for future clarification of what one would consider to be affective. This is a question I would keep but add an open-ended question for the participants to explain what made the session effective.

Would you will be willing to share your story with a non-church member? Yes

10 responses

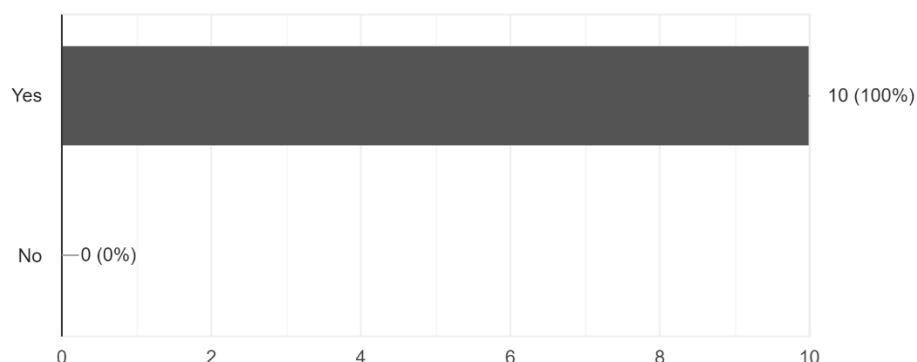


Figure 6. Willingness to share story with a non-church member

The above data shows how willing participants were to share their story with a non-church member. This was imperative as the overall goal of the project was to see if participants would be willing to sharing their story with others. While the data reflects one hundred percent of the participants would be willing to share their story, I wonder if the data would reflect a different outcome had I asked the question, would you be willing to share your story with a fellow church member? In my estimation, I believe the change of language to reflect the change of receipt could impact the overall willingness of sharing their story with those closest to them, and with whom they live and are in community with.

Biases and Limitations

Even though the desire is to live and do life in community with one another objectively, the implementation of this project did not escape my professional bias, my status as the participant-observer, and environmental limitations. As a trained mental health clinician, I acknowledge my professional bias due to my educational and formal

training. The formal education and continued training I receive causes me to have a propensity to view people, places, and situations through the lens of mental health and wellbeing. While this has been helpful in ministry in discerning when professional and community interventions are needed, I must practice self-awareness to ensure that I am not transferring my problems or concerns onto the participants or allowing my issues to bleed over in the context.

While I am aware of this bias, I am unapologetic for my desire to provide holistic ministry both in and outside of the church. My position as a social worker and mental health clinician does not stop when I am with The Message Church or any church setting, but rather, it informs how I do ministry. In addition to my professional bias, I also had to contend with my presence as a participant-observer. This role was evitable as I was the scholar and the pastor. Even though I asked the participants to be honest in their feedback, I acknowledge that by the position held as pastor, some may not have been comfortable, even in anonymity, sharing their true feelings or thoughts. I believe others who are in a position of authority will find similar outcomes.

Finally, the environment provided limitations at the time of delivery. Initially, when this project was designed, the desire was to be in person. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 in 2019 and the church's decision to cease meeting in person, the project had to be executed via Zoom. With the project being fully online, there was the need to be sensitive to being online all day due to work or other activities and the meeting time, which is traditionally a time for family dinners or activities. If the group had the ability to meet in person, a meal and light snacks would have been provided to the participants to consume during the sessions.

In addition to the project being completely online, another limitation was the delivery and consistent receipt of all project-related materials. Receiving a wet signature would have been a lot easier in person due to the immediate task of the person to complete the required documents. Unfortunately, since all materials were provided online, I had to compete with the other emails inundating the participants' inboxes and the fatigue of being connected prior to the sessions. I did my best to keep emails concise, clear, and sent hours before the actual session to ensure the emails would be at the top of the participants' inboxes. Knowing people were busy, I found myself having to send several reminder emails to the group in addition to making announcements during the sessions for all information to be completed.

In addition to competing with the checking of emails, I believe participation would have been greater if an in-person option had been available to participants. While I would have done this due to the safety of the participants, I believe offering a hybrid option would have encouraged more people to meet in person or online. In the future, in consideration of the way the world has changed due to the worldwide pandemic, I recommend having a hybrid option to accommodate all possible participants.

Additionally, the participants' lack of diversity limited my ability to see if gender impacted the information reported significantly. Keep in mind only ten percent of the group was male. Seeing that many of the participants and myself were women raises the question would an all-male group be comfortable with sharing their stories or even engaging with the female-orientated nature of the sessions (i.e., The Woman with the Issue of Blood, Womanist Theology, Mental Health, Female Christian figures, and the Women's Suffrage Movement).

The final limitation that is worth noting was my condition at the time of the project. I was in my third trimester of pregnancy and had to be on maternity leave sooner than anticipated due to the possible early arrival of my youngest child. Though her birth was scheduled with babies, there is no guarantee to make it to the scheduled due date. So, in turn of the early maternity leave, the group met for a combined fifth and sixth session, which ran for three hours, to ensure all the work was completed. Ideally, I would have liked to complete the final sessions as scheduled, but to maximize the momentum of the project participants, the decision was made in agreement with the group.

Additional Findings

In addition to the project outcomes, I would like to highlight some information that resulted from the sessions that is important to understand in the overall project.

Would you refer a church member to attend this session? Yes
10 responses

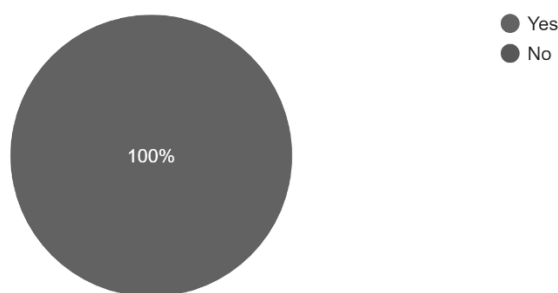


Figure 7. Referral to session

In figure six, the data shows the overwhelming majority, one hundred percent, of the participants shared they would refer another member to the session. This was an interesting result to see as only fifty percent of the participants reported the sessions being effective as seen in figure six. This outcome causes me to wonder if the referral to

the group was based on social participation, or by virtue of wanting to assist their pastor with their project. The following graph shows if participants currently serve as ministry leaders.

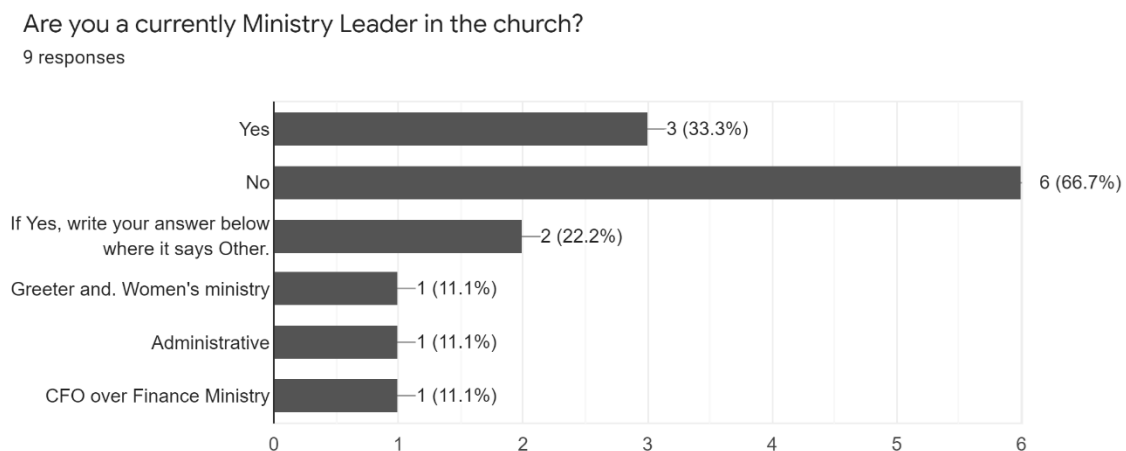


Figure 8. Current ministry leader

The data shows that only thirty percent of the members reported being ministry leaders. After visual examination of the participants, fifty-five percent of them are ministry leaders. This is also an interesting finding as this raise concerns in participants recognizing their leadership roles and whether the church has clarified their leadership roles. This is an area that I plan to take back to our leadership team to ensure those serving in leadership roles understand they are leaders.

Do you desire to become a Ministry Leader in the church?

8 responses

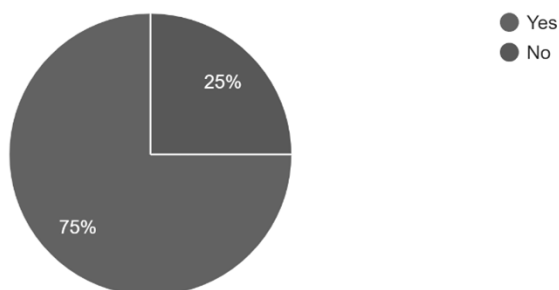


Figure 9. Desire to become a ministry leader

Figure eight reflects the desire of participants to be ministry leaders. Seventy-five percent of the participants shared they desire to become ministry leaders, while twenty five percent shared, they did not want to be ministry leaders. This was interesting as mentioned in figure seven, there were more leaders on the call then not, but the two graphs did not show the numbers as such. This again lends itself to clarification that needs to be discussed with the current leadership.

The following graphs show the true outcome of the project.

Have you ever shared your testimony with others?

responses

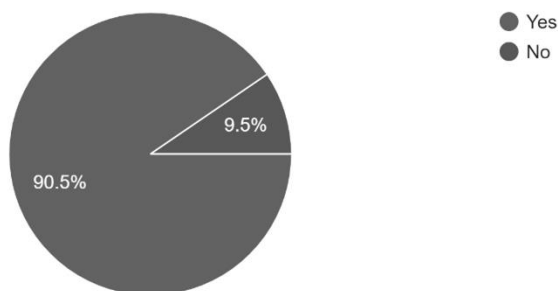


Figure 10. Sharing of testimony with others

Do you know feel comfortable sharing your testimony with others?
responses

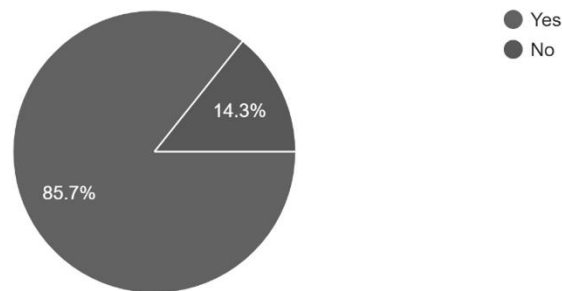


Figure 11. Comfort level of sharing one's testimony with others

Do you feel like your testimony will help someone else?
responses

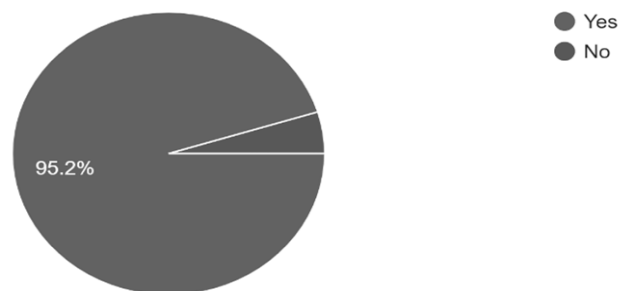


Figure 12. Will one's testimony help someone else

Figures nine through eleven show the overall outcome of this project. After implementation, more than eighty percent of participants had either shared their story with others, felt comfortable telling their testimony with others, or felt like their testimony would help others. These three data points alone proved that the participants are willing and able to share their story even before learning a model for transparent discipleship. Early in the formation of this project I stated, if the project participants participate in a training program about transparent testimony, then they will have the tools necessary to engage in transparent discipleship. This data alone proves that the participants have been engaging in informal transparent discipleship by sharing their

stories with others. I realize and the data reflects that storytelling is something the participants have been doing long before signing up for this project. This project simply gave them the language and affirmation to continue the work they are already doing in their respective circles of influences.

Conclusion

After reflecting on the overall project, I came to the conclusion that the participants involved in the study are already telling their stories and that self-worth and self-esteem is not a factor for a majority of the participants. While the participants in the project were telling their stories long before joining the group, I believe if some of the members who showed hesitation in sharing their stories publicly had participated, the overall outcome would have reflected a favorable outcome for the project's hypothesis.

Only ten percent of the participants at any given time mentioned self-esteem or self-worth as impacting their ability or desire to share their stories or testimony with others. In light of the small number, the overwhelming consensus was the timing and relevance of their stories in relation to telling others as the most important factors. While I am ecstatic to hear the participants are comfortable in sharing their stories, I wonder if the participants' views and behaviors reflect the overall attitude and conscience of the larger group. I wonder, at the end of this project, if the participants who left affirmed and equipped, will take the tools learned, use them, and continue to change lives and change the world.

Additionally, when implementing this project, take time to do an anonymous survey on your context to see if testimony is important to them, their level of public

speaking, and what factors impact their desire or lack thereof to share their testimony with the larger congregation. If you are working in a context with small groups in place, utilize the leaders of those small groups to implement the project, since the rapport has already been established. As stated, relationships are imperative for the participants to feel a level of comfort in being vulnerable and telling their stories.

Also, while this project was delivered at a predominantly African American church, this project can be used cross culturally, with various ages, and genders. With the addition of another Bible passage that provides a narrative discipleship story, the identification of a problem that impacts the identified population, and historical adjustments, this project lends itself to be utilized in several ways. Overall, the goal is to assist the body of Christ with obtaining a level of vulnerability and transparency from the pulpit to the pew. This level of transparency coupled with discipleship could lead to the development of relationships in and outside the congregation that continues to expand the kingdom of God one person at a time.

Even though this journey has come to an end for me, my hope is that everyone who reads this body of work will engage in transparent discipleship to tell their stories and testimonies to all who are willing to listen.

APPENDIX A
SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

Session One: "*Who Am I?: The Art of Transparent Testimony.*"

1. Welcome
2. Project Introduction by Researcher
3. Pre-Assessment on Story Telling
4. Group Expectations
5. Group Covenant Agreement
6. Introduction of Transparent Testimony
 - a. What is a testimony?
 - b. Researcher shares brief personal testimony
7. Biblical teaching
 - a. Luke 8:40-48 - The Hemorrhaging woman
 - b. Site other Biblical examples of testimonies in the Bible
8. Closing affirmation
9. Homework (if applicable)
 - a. Focus journaling: Participants read Luke 8:40-48 and respond to questions found in online in Google Docs.

Session Two: "*What Makes a Good Story?: Learning the Elements of a Story and Storytelling.*"

1. Check-In
2. Group Covenant Agreement
3. Introduction of Dr. Anne Wimberly: Soul Stories
 - a. Engaging the Everyday Story
 - b. Engaging the Christian Faith in the Bible
 - c. Engaging the Christian Faith Story from African American Heritage
 - d. Engaging in Christian Ethical Decision Making
4. Closing Affirmation
5. Homework (if applicable)
 - a. Focus journaling: After learning about Story Linking by Dr. Anne Wimberly, identify and write about your everyday story.

Session Three: "*You Can't Tell It All: The Importance of Knowing and How to Appropriately Articulate One's Testimony (Story) in the Presence of Others.*"

1. Check-In
 2. Group Covenant Agreement
 3. Group discussion on Story Telling from a Public Relations
- Discuss the article: <https://www.communiquepr.com/the-art-of-storytelling-in-public-relations-5-narrative-elements/8901/>

4. Closing Affirmation
5. Homework (if applicable)
 - a. Focused Journaling: Further reflect on the identified elements of a story and ways to implement them in telling one's testimony.

Session Four: "*You Got a Story to Tell: Learning to Find One's Voice in the Midst of Life's Challenges.*"

1. Check-In
2. Group Covenant Agreement
3. Mental Health in the African American Community
4. Introduction and completion of the Beck's Inventory of Depression
5. Debrief of Beck's Inventory of Depression
6. Closing Affirmation
7. Homework (if applicable)
 - a. Focused Journaling: Do you believe there is a stigma to mental health in the African American community? How do you feel about mental health? If you felt you were in crisis, would you know how to connect with mental health professionals in the community?

Session Five: *"I Need to Hear from You: The Impact of One's Story on Others in Their Community."*

1. Check-In
2. Group Covenant Agreement
3. Introduction of Historical Christian Figures
 - a. Rev. Jarena Lee
 - b. Rev. Julia A. J. Foote
 - c. Evangelist Zilpha Elaw
4. Discussion of present-day figures whose lives have changed the world.
5. Closing Affirmation
6. Homework (if applicable)
 - a. Focus journaling: Write about a person in your life, historical or famous, whose life story has impacted you?

Session Six: *"It Is a Wrap: Finding Your Voice to Go and Tell It on the Mountain."* Final Session

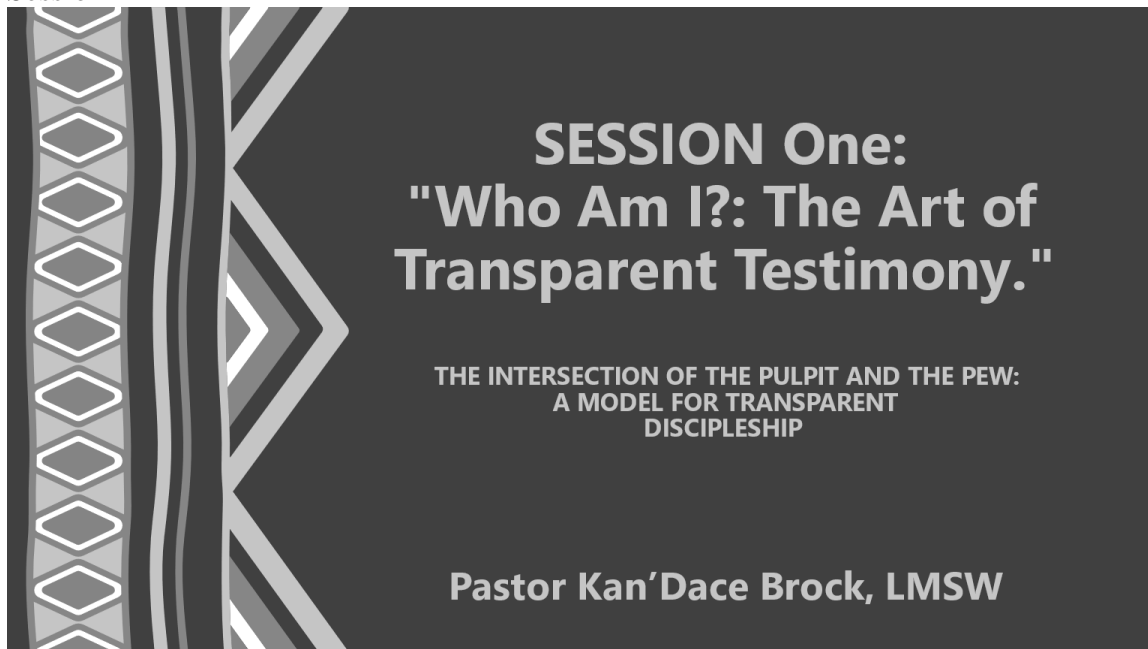
1. Review of the previous weeks of storytelling and transparent discipleship
2. Post-survey on storytelling
3. Closing litany and affirmation
4. Homework (if applicable)
 - a. Return all journals and assessments.

APPENDIX B

IMPLEMENTATION INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION

IMPLEMENTATION INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION

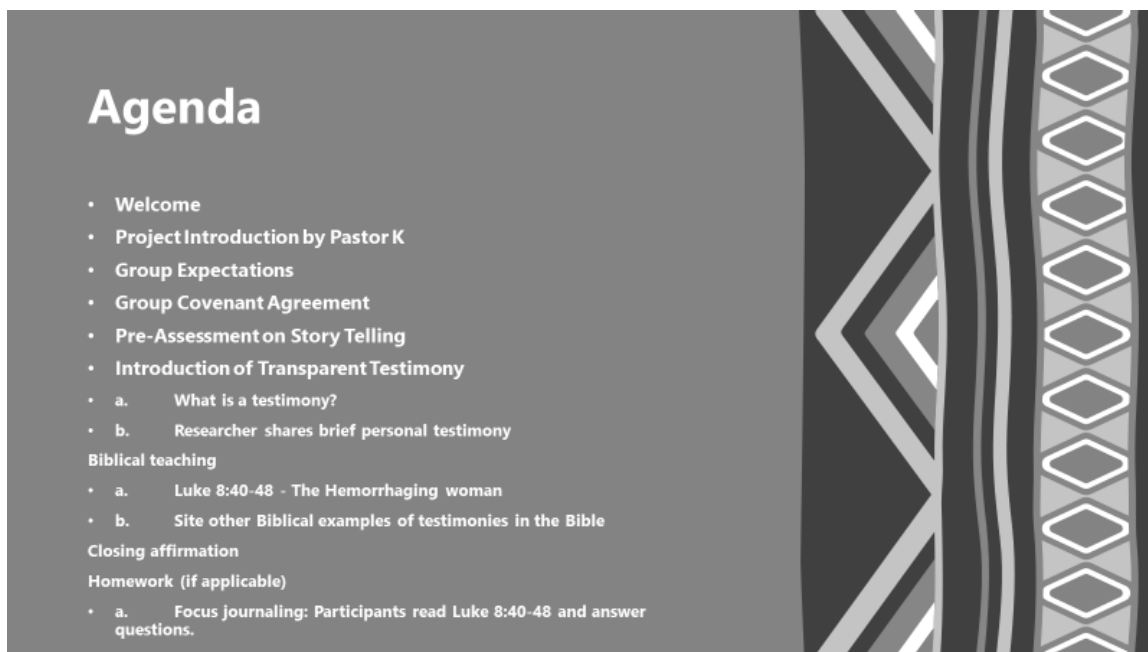
Session 1



SESSION One:
**"Who Am I?: The Art of
 Transparent Testimony."**

THE INTERSECTION OF THE PULPIT AND THE PEW:
 A MODEL FOR TRANSPARENT
 DISCIPLESHIP

Pastor Kan'Dace Brock, LMSW



Agenda

- Welcome
- Project Introduction by Pastor K
- Group Expectations
- Group Covenant Agreement
- Pre-Assessment on Story Telling
- Introduction of Transparent Testimony
 - a. What is a testimony?
 - b. Researcher shares brief personal testimony
- Biblical teaching
 - a. Luke 8:40-48 - The Hemorrhaging woman
 - b. Site other Biblical examples of testimonies in the Bible
- Closing affirmation
- Homework (if applicable)
 - a. Focus journaling: Participants read Luke 8:40-48 and answer questions.

Welcome/ Consent Form

Project Introduction
 "The Intersection of the Pulpit and the Pew: A Model for Transparent Discipleship."

Group Expectations/ Covenant Agreement

GROUP COVENANT

This covenant is an agreement of what the participant is committing to in the Group Project, "The Intersection of the Pulpit and the Pew: A Model for Transparent Discipleship." Similar to ground or group rules, this covenant will be discussed weekly, as a gentle reminder of the community we strive to live in at The Message Church.

////////////////////////////////////

OUR GROUP WILL:

- 1. Meet every Wednesday evening, beginning on April 21 through May 26 at 6:30 p.m. and end at about 8:00 p.m.
- 2. "Arrive" (log in) on time and be fully engaged in the group discussion.
- 3. Be committed to support self and one another.
- 4. Participate to the best of our ability in the discussions and homework.
- 5. Allow people to have a voice and a choice when participating in discussions.

I WILL:

- • Make Group meetings a priority, and if I am running late or unable to attend, I will let someone know who will be attending.
- • Be prepared and ready to participate in the discussion of that week's topic.
- • Keep confidential the personal information shared at Group.
- • Create a safe place for each member to share with no judgments attached.
- • Be transparent and accountable to the group.
- • Take ownership of my responsibility of being faithful, accountable, and teachable.
- • Pray regularly for my fellow Group members and facilitator.
- • Return all materials as requested by group facilitator in a timely manner.

Pre-Assessment on Story Telling

At this time go to your email and you will have a link for a Google Doc.
Complete the Form to the best of your ability.

Introduction of Transparent Testimony

**Sooooooo,
you want me to say what again Pastor K?**

What is a Testimony?

A testimony is a firsthand authentication of a fact.


An open acknowledgment

It's your story

Biblical Teaching

Luke 8:40-48

The Hemorrhaging Woman
"The Woman with the issue of Blood."



What are some other Biblical Examples of Testimonies?



Luke 8:40-48 NRSV

A Girl Restored to Life and a Woman Healed

40 Now when Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed him, for they were all waiting for him. 41 Just then there came a man named Jairus, a leader of the synagogue. He fell at Jesus' feet and begged him to come to his house, 42 for he had an only daughter, about twelve years old, who was dying. As he went, the crowds pressed in on him. 43 Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years; and though she had spent all she had on physicians, no one could cure her. 44 She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his clothes, and immediately her hemorrhage stopped. 45 Then Jesus asked, "Who touched me?" When all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the crowds surround you and press in on you." 46 But Jesus said, "Someone touched me; for I noticed that power had gone out from me." 47 When the woman saw that she could not remain hidden, she came trembling; and falling down before him, she declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed. 48 He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace."

**What does the Woman
in Luke teach us?**

- 1.Dilemma**
- 2.Determination**
- 3.Declaration**
- 4.Deliverance**



Closing Affirmation

**YOU have,
WE have,
I have,**

A STORY TO TELL!

My story isn't your story. Your story isn't my story.

But within our stories we can change lives and change the world.

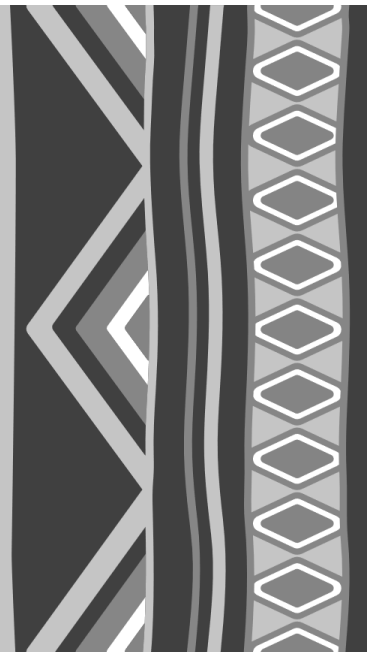
**When Jesus entered into our hearts. We became Kingdom minded
and our behavior showed our relationship with Christ. And because
of Jesus' presence in our life, we can share our stories.**

**We can tell others how in the hardest times in our lives, when we
touched the hem of our Savior's garment, our lives changed forever.**

And since our lives have changed:

**YOU have,
WE have,
I have,**

A STORY TO TELL!





Homework

Focus journaling on the Hemorrhaging Woman

Click on the link in your email to access your journal assignments for the week.

APPENDIX C

PRE-POST STORY TELLING ASSESSMENT

Participant #: _____

Pre/ Post-Story telling Assessment

1. What is your (*unassisted*) definition of the word testimony? ** *Unassisted refers to the person's definition without the use of a textbook, or smart device to look up the definition.* **

What is your (*unassisted*) definition of the word story?

2. Is there a difference between a story and a testimony? ____ Yes ____ No
3. Have you ever shared your testimony with others? ____ Yes ____ No
4. Do you now feel comfortable sharing your testimony with others? ____ Yes ____ No
5. Do you feel like your testimony will help someone else? ____ Yes ____ No
6. What belongs in your testimony?
7. As a participant in weekly studies, what is one thing you hope to gain from this weekly Group?

Thank you for your cooperation and time!

APPENDIX D
GROUP DISCUSSION

“The Intersection of The Pulpit and The Pew: A Model for Transparent Discipleship” Group Project

Group Discussion

Have you ever heard the story of someone that moved you to tears? Do you feel you are worthy to share your testimony? Does your self-esteem keep you quiet when in group settings? If you answered yes to any of these questions, this Group is for you!

OUR PURPOSE

- Define Transparent Discipleship
- Discuss Mental Health
- Provide Confidentiality
- Get to know one another

The Message Church, under the leadership of Pastor Kan'Dace Brock will host weekly group discussions beginning February 3 - March 10, 2021 via Zoom. These weekly sessions will discuss the importance of testimony (storytelling) in and outside of the church, provide tools for testimony sharing, and discuss the impact of self-worth, self-esteem, and shame have on the sharing of one's testimony. This Group is open to all Messengers aged eighteen years and older who are currently ministry leaders or aspire to serve in the future (**Space is limited, so first come, first serve**). If you are interested in participating in this Group, an informational meeting will be available the last week of January. Volunteers will be encouraged to join this ministry. However, a limited number of volunteers will be chosen.

At The Message Church, we know that we are called to change lives and change the world everyday by keeping it real, relevant, and relational. What easier way to change lives and change the world than through telling your story that Jesus Christ came into your life and changed you!

Please RSVP with your name, address, best contact number, and email address via email to Pastor Kan'Dace Brock at **pastork@themessagesa.org**. RSVP no later than February 1, 2021. If you have any questions or feedback regarding this opportunity, feel free to contact me.

APPENDIX E
CONSENT FORM

Consent Form

Project Title: "The Intersection of the Pulpit and The Pew: A Model for Transparent Discipleship." San Antonio, TX

Project Director: Rev. Kan'Dace L. Brock, LMSW

Name of participant: _____
(Please print first and last name)

Are you at least 18 years old? _____ yes _____no

Please read and initial each section below.

Your initials indicate you have read and understood each section.

The Research Project

_____ This project is designed to explore ways for the church to attract, engage, and understand how to retain adult members for the future of the ministry. The study will attempt to identify reasons members may actively become involved in Transparent Discipleship at The Message Church, what attracts them to a church, and identify other practical methodologies for retaining them in ministry.

Expectations of the Human Research Subject

_____ After my consent to participate in the study, I will complete a pre-survey that will provide initial input for the project. Each week I will participate in a different phase of the project. The phases will include an introduction, check-in/centering moment, teaching moment, an application moment, focused journaling (as homework), and post-survey, and project evaluation.

Consent

_____ I agree to participate in this project as a human research subject. I understand that at any point in this project, I can withdraw my participation without explanation. I understand that if I elect to withdraw my participation, it will have no effect on membership at The Message Church. I understand that I will not be compensated for participation as a human research subject for this project.

Confidentiality

_____ I understand that this consent form, questionnaires, surveys, and other collected data will be maintained and stored in strict compliance with privacy in Rev. Brock's locked file cabinet in her home/church office, 7126 Watertrout Bay, San Antonio, TX 78244

All electronic data will be deleted, and all paper data collected will be shredded after the final examination of the dissertation. The Project Director will be the only one with access to the information.

Risks for Human Research Subjects

_____ I do not foresee any risks in taking part in this research. I understand that responses will be covered in anonymity, and no one will be able to deduce from my responses to my exact identity. If the project director chooses to use quotes from my feedback, it will be anonymous. My contributions to the study will be safeguarded from the public view for the duration of the study.

Benefits of the Study

_____ I understand that the benefits of participating in this research would be an opportunity to explore ways of learning tools and practices for telling my story (testimony) within The Message Church and with others in the community.

_____ I offer my participation voluntarily and without coercion.

_____ I agree to be interviewed at my convenience if I give my permission.

Please initial one box only

_____ I agree to be interviewed

_____ I do not agree to be interviewed

I agree that by signing this consent form, I acknowledge that I have read, understand, and agree with the terms as a human research subject. Even though this consent form bears my signature, I understand I have the right to withdraw entirely without explanation and at any time.

Human subject research signature

Date

Project Director signature

Date

APPENDIX F
GROUP COVENANT

GROUP COVENANT

This covenant is an agreement of what the participant is committing to in the Group Project, “The Intersection of the Pulpit and the Pew: A Model for Transparent Discipleship.” Similar to ground or group rules, this covenant will be discussed weekly, as a gentle reminder of the community we strive to live in at The Message Church.

//

OUR GROUP WILL:

1. Meet every Wednesday evening, beginning on February 3 through March 10 at 6:30 p.m. and end at about 8:00 p.m.
2. “Arrive” (log in) on time and be fully engaged in the group discussion.
3. Be committed to support self and one another.
4. Participate to the best of our ability in the discussions and homework.
5. Allow people to have a voice and a choice when participating in discussions.

I WILL:

- Make Group meetings a priority, and if I am running late or unable to attend, I will let someone know who will be attending.
- Be prepared and ready to participate in the discussion of that week’s topic.
- Keep confidential the personal information shared at Group.
- Create a safe place for each member to share with no judgments attached.
- Be transparent and accountable to the Group.
- Take ownership of my responsibility of being faithful, accountable, and teachable.
- Pray regularly for my fellow Group members and facilitator.
- Return all materials as requested by group facilitator in a timely manner.¹

Signature: _____ Date: _____

¹ CPC Small Groups, “College Park Church,” CPC Small Groups, <https://cpcsmallgroups.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/SMALL-GROUP-COVENANT-SAMPLES-PDF.pdf>.

APPENDIX G
DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Participant #: _____

Demographic Questionnaire

1. Age _____
2. Race/Ethnicity
 - ☐ Hispanic or Latino
 - ☐ Non-Hispanic or Latino
 - Race
 - ☐ African American, Black
 - ☐ Caucasian, White
 - ☐ Asian
 - ☐ Pacific Islander
 - ☐ Two or more races
 - ☐ American Indian and Alaska Native
 - ☐ Other: _____
3. Education:

<input type="checkbox"/> Did not graduate high school	<input type="checkbox"/> College graduate
<input type="checkbox"/> High school grad/GED	<input type="checkbox"/> Master's degree (Professional)
<input type="checkbox"/> Some college	<input type="checkbox"/> Terminal degree
4. Marital status: _____ Single _____ Married _____ Divorced _____ Widowed
_____ Partnership
5. Number of children: _____
6. Length of membership at The Message Church: _____
7. Ministry area where you served:

8. Are you a **current** Ministry Leader in the Church? ____ Yes ____ No. If Yes, what is your role?

9. Do you desire to **become** a Ministry Leader in the Church? ____ Yes ____ No.

Thank you for your cooperation and time.

APPENDIX H

PRE-POST STORYTELLING ASSESSMENT

Participant #: _____

Pre/ Post-Storytelling Assessment

1. What is your (*unassisted*) definition of the word testimony? ** *Unassisted refers to the person's definition without the use of a textbook, or smart device to look up the definition.* **

2. What is your (*unassisted*) definition of the word story?

3. Is there a difference between a story and a testimony? ____ Yes ____ No
4. Have you ever shared your testimony with others? ____ Yes ____ No
5. Do you know feel comfortable sharing your testimony with others? ____ Yes ____ No
6. Do you feel like your testimony will help someone else? ____ Yes ____ No
7. What belongs in your testimony?
8. As a participate in weekly studies, what is one thing you hope to gain from this weekly Group?

Thank you for your cooperation and time!

APPENDIX I
PROJECT EVALUATION

The Intersection of the Pulpit and the Pew: A Model for Transparent Discipleship

Participate # _____

Date _____

Project Evaluation

1. Have you gained better insight on how to articulate your story (testimony) since your participation in this project?
2. Has your perception of the importance of storytelling in and outside of church changed since participating in this project?

Exceptional	Good	Average	Poor
4	3	2	1

PRESENTATION	Exceptional	Good	Average	Poor	N/A
Clear					
Effective					
Organized					

CONTENT	Exceptional	Good	Average	Poor	N/A
Biblically sound					
Was there supported and elaborated information?					
Alternative perspectives and/or opinions given?					

COMMUNICATION SKILLS	Exceptional	Good	Average	Poor	N/A
Information clearly explained.					
Was there a clear, easy to read slide presentation?					
Were questions answered with authority?					
Used active listening skills?					

Please answer each question by placing an “X” in the box

REFERRAL	YES	NO
Would you refer a church member to attend this session?		
Would you be willing to share your story with a non-church member?		

APPENDIX J

BECK DEPRESSION INVENTORY

Beck Depression Inventory - II

Instructions: This questionnaire consists of 21 groups of statements. Please read each Group of statements carefully. And then pick out the one statement in each Group that best describes the way you have been feeling during the past two weeks, including today. Circle the number beside the statement you have picked. If several statements in the Group seem to apply equally well, circle the highest number for that Group. Be sure that you do not choose more than one statement for any group, including Item 16 (Changes in Sleeping Pattern) or Item 18 (Changes in Appetite).

1. Sadness

- 0. I do not feel sad.
- 1. I feel sad much of the time.
- 2. I am sad all the time.
- 3. I am so sad or unhappy that I can't stand it.

2. Pessimism

- 0. I am not discouraged about my future.
- 1. I feel more discouraged about my future than I used to.
- 2. I do not expect things to work out for me.
- 3. I feel my future is hopeless and will only get worse.

3. Past Failure

- 0. I do not feel like a failure.
- 1. I have failed more than I should have.
- 2. As I look back, I see a lot of failures.
- 3. I feel I am a total failure as a person.

4. Loss of Pleasure

0. I get as much pleasure as I ever did from the things I enjoy.

1. I don't enjoy things as much as I used to.

2. I get very little pleasure from the things I used to enjoy.

3. I can't get any pleasure from the things I used to enjoy.

5. Guilty Feelings

0. I don't feel particularly guilty.

1. I feel guilty over many things I have done or should have done.

2. I feel quite guilty most of the time.

3. I feel guilty all of the time.

6. Punishment Feelings

0. I don't feel I am being punished.

1. I feel I may be punished.

2. I expect to be punished.

3. I feel I am being punished.

7. Self-Dislike

0. I feel the same about myself as ever.

1. I have lost confidence in myself.

2. I am disappointed in myself.

3. I dislike myself.

8. Self-Criticalness

- 0. I don't criticize or blame myself more than usual.
- 1. I am more critical of myself than I used to be.
- 2. I criticize myself for all of my faults.
- 3. I blame myself for everything bad that happens.

9. Suicidal Thoughts or Wishes

- 0. I don't have any thoughts of killing myself.
- 1. I have thoughts of killing myself, but I would not carry them out.
- 2. I would like to kill myself.
- 3. I would kill myself if I had the chance.

10. Crying

- 0. I don't cry any more than I used to.
- 1. I cry more than I used to.
- 2. I cry over every little thing.
- 3. I feel like crying, but I can't.

11. Agitation

- 0. I am no more restless or wound up than usual.
- 1. I feel more restless or wound up than usual.
- 2. I am so restless or agitated, it's hard to stay still.
- 3. I am so restless or agitated that I have to keep moving or doing something.

12. Loss of Interest

- 0. I have not lost interest in other people or activities.
- 1. I am less interested in other people or things than before.
- 2. I have lost most of my interest in other people or things.
- 3. It's hard to get interested in anything.

13. Indecisiveness

- 0. I make decisions about as well as ever.
- 1. I find it more difficult to make decisions than usual.
- 2. I have much greater difficulty in making decisions than I used to.
- 3. I have trouble making any decisions.

14. Worthlessness

- 0. I do not feel I am worthless.
- 1. I don't consider myself as worthwhile and useful as I used to.
- 2. I feel more worthless as compared to others.
- 3. I feel utterly worthless.

15. Loss of Energy

- 0. I have as much energy as ever.
- 1. I have less energy than I used to have.
- 2. I don't have enough energy to do very much.
- 3. I don't have enough energy to do anything.

16. Changes in Sleeping Pattern

- 0. I have not experienced any change in my sleeping.

1a I sleep somewhat more than usual.

1b I sleep somewhat less than usual.

2a I sleep a lot more than usual.

2b I sleep a lot less than usual.

3a I sleep most of the day.

3b I wake up 1-2 hours early and can't get back to sleep.

17. Irritability

0. I am not more irritable than usual.

1. I am more irritable than usual.

2. I am much more irritable than usual.

3. I am irritable all the time.

18. Changes in Appetite

0. I have not experienced any change in my appetite.

1a My appetite is somewhat less than usual.

1b My appetite is somewhat greater than usual.

2a My appetite is much less than before.

2b My appetite is much greater than usual.

3a I have no appetite at all.

3b I crave food all the time.

19. Concentration Difficulty

0. I can concentrate as well as ever.

1. I can't concentrate as well as usual.

2. It's hard to keep my mind on anything for very long.

3. I find I can't concentrate on anything.

20. Tiredness or Fatigue

0. I am no more tired or fatigued than usual.

1. I get more tired or fatigued more easily than usual.

2. I am too tired or fatigued to do a lot of the things I used to do.

3. I am too tired or fatigued to do most of the things I used to do.

21. Loss of Interest in Sex

0. I have not noticed any recent change in my interest in sex.

1. I am less interested in sex than I used to be.

2. I am much less interested in sex now.

3. I have lost interest in sex completely.

Total Score: _____

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Interpretation of the scores (Total scores)

Score Category

0-10 These ups and downs are considered to be normal

11-16 Mild mood disturbance

17 – 20	Borderline clinical disturbance
21 – 30	Moderate depression
31 – 40	Severe depression
Above 40	Extreme depression

If a participant scores ≥ 17 , we should consider contacting the participant to follow up on this and offer making a note for the participant's doctor describing the scores.

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